



INTO OBLIVION

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Jeff R. Smith

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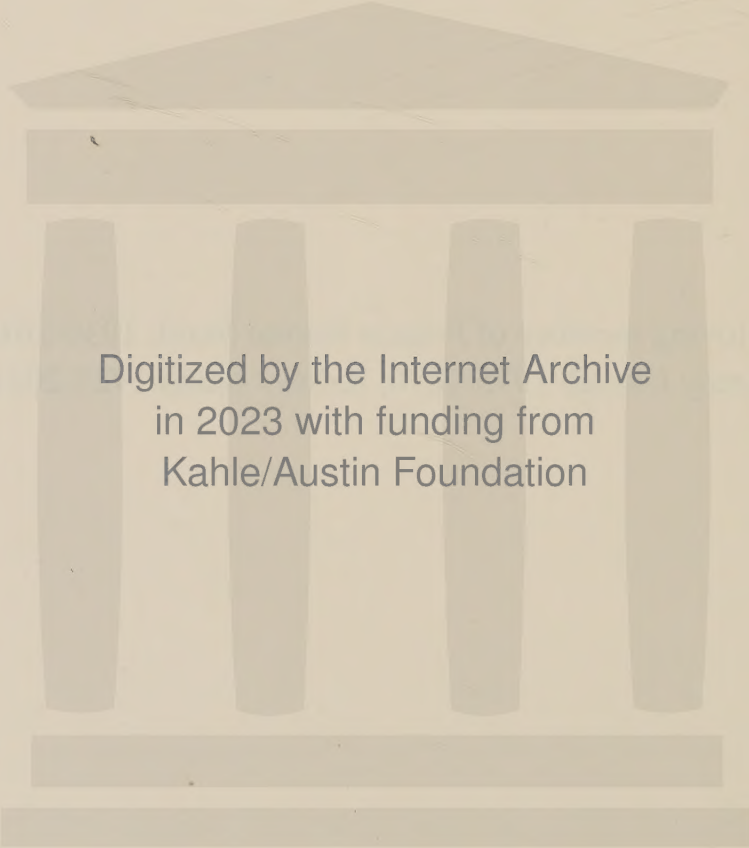
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Preface

MUCH OF THIS story is written as seen through the eyes of Randal Wagner. He is a common, everyday father, husband and friend who just tries to live his life in the best way he can. The man doesn't see himself as anyone special, but he does seem to attract certain types of people who, for whatever reason, find him to be that someone to follow.

It's said throughout the writing world that a first person viewpoint is the most difficult to write. Yet, my first attempt is written in such a way as to include more of this style than those more commonly used.

Maybe it is me who is flawed. I have had some tell me that I have a special talent while others say I should go back to college and learn to write a book.

Anyone can do things the way others tell them to. It takes believing in yourself to do things your own way and let the people determine the outcome.

Feel free to become Randal Wagner while reading this—if you so desire.

Chapter 1

“NEW LIFE, OR fast death?” I asked myself about what was to become of me and my family.

The reason I asked the question is because I just won the Lottery for my family to go aboard a ship that is supposed to take us to another world, but most of the ships that try to take off from Earth, blow-up before they leave the ground.

One would think that our military would be able to protect those ships better, but they have yet to stop many of the members of S.S.D.T.R. (that stands for Save Space, Destroy The Race, for all of you new-comers), so far.

Last week I had a normal job, a house mortgage, car payments, and a family of five.

I can see my wife Loranda looking at me like her world has turned upside down. It's no wonder, she has had something similar done to her over the last several days.

The whole world is looking at impending disaster, and only a few supposed lucky ones are going to be able to

leave, in the hopes of starting over in the great unknown. So far, only a couple of those miracle ships have made it out of Earth's atmosphere, and today, my three sons, my wife and I are to get onto one of those very vessels, leaving most of what we know and own behind.

It's really hard to gather the items that mean the most to you, and leave everything else behind. It becomes harder when you are only allotted two Government Issue suitcases per person, and one 3'X3'X6' family trunk, all delivered the day after the Lottery drawing.

We were also allotted a large travel carriage for our well trained family pet Betsy, a wonderful German Shepard, which made the boys happier about leaving.

To say that eating our breakfast for the last time in our home this morning felt weird is an understatement. One way or another we knew that we would never again eat in this house, see our friends and extended family, or even see the same sky.

My boys weren't going to leave ALL of their favorite possessions behind, so I let each of them choose that one item they couldn't live without. Ten year-old Kevin chose a football and basket ball, both of which were deflated, and we took a small hand pump set with them. Michael, our seven year old, packed a bag of his 1/72 scale soldiers, with a few must-have vehicles. Our youngest, Kyle, at only five years of age, decided on his small building blocks and a handful on his Hot Wheels and Match Box cars.

How does a family pack for an unknown future, on an unknown planet?

We didn't know, but we did try to use reason for most of our available space. Loranda and I went over things at

least a dozen times before we staged it all on the floor of our living room. Looking at it all, we realized we had way too much, so started packing most needed large items first. We didn't waste that space between large items, if there was room for anything at all, we filled those gaps.

Each of us started with six outfits of durable clothes each, two for warm, cold, and mild weather. Some of these clothes became packing between other items, as they would protect damageable items, and could be squeezed into strange areas.

We filled the trunk with necessities like a cast-iron frying pan and Dutch Oven, a few good cooking utensils, real silverware, steak knives, and ten containers of salt, that were packed in the tops of our new hiking boots. Loranda added packages of needles and nylon thread, buttons and zippers, and snaps to fasten clothing together. I threw in four good compound bows, extra strings, arm guards, a large assortment of arrows, extra fletching, tips, and knocks. I had bought a couple of combat strength carbon steel swords over the years and made sure they were taken, along with several "Survival" style knives. We added a few important books on first aid, gardening, and stone construction, to name a few. I then grabbed some of the smaller hand tools that I could fit in crevasses, two good hammers, one for framing and one finish, two pair of lineman pliers, tape-measures, cold chisels, quick-squares, screw-drivers(including an old ratchet style push driver/drill), drill-bits, minus the room taking cases, bullet levels, adjustable wrenches, punches, nail sets, carpenter pencils, and Allen-wrenches. All of this was scattered about in hap-hazard form, but I wasn't going

to waste precious space. My only extravagance was to bring a World War II set of games, compacted into one box and small bag, which my boys and I enjoyed playing together.

When we left our home, it was like five rounded clothing hangers walking to the four door pick-up. There were no written limits to what we could wear, or carry in our pockets, “with the government exclusions for firearms and electronics”, so we added layers of extra clothes, and filled our pockets with last minute forget-me-not’s. We all wore extra belts, and Loranda and I added several pocket knives, small hand tools, fire starters, water tabs, magnifying glasses, pens and mechanical pencils, erasers, extra dice for D20 games, honing oil and stones, small mil files, tweezers, and nail clippers.

We all wore our best coat, a ball cap or two, sun glasses, gloves, scarves, and fanny packs full of more items. Loranda and I wore cowboy style hats for better protection than ball caps, and we both pocketed more sets of sun glasses and safety glasses as spares.

Our dog Betsy was loaded in the back of the truck with our luggage as we climbed into the cab area.

The driver was polite about asking for all the keys to our home and cars, then he called over his radio that it was time to move out. I couldn’t help but notice the double meaning behind the statement.

After nearly four hours on the road, minus a few bathroom stops, and our last fast-food drive through, we finally came to a large military looking base, with a huge ship down the road. I was starting to get excited and nervous all at the same time, then I saw the line in front of us. Nobody would

ever get an award for hurrying to get aboard, or so it seemed. It took us three more hours to get to the front of the line, the boys were complaining about how hot the extra clothes were during most of that time.

Behind us stretched a line about as long as we had been in to start with, maybe a bit shorter, but not by much. Things could have been worse, at least there were snacks and soft drinks available for those who wanted them, and outhouses for those that needed them.

I handed over the forms that I was given upon our arrival to the clerk that was across the table from us, before our luggage was run through a scanner on a conveyer belt that would lead to the ship. During this process we were likewise searched for any contraband, things like guns, explosives, drugs, food items, and any non-necessary electronics. Our only blip was Michael's digital watch. He was informed that it wouldn't work when we arrived, but he wanted it because it was from his favorite grandfather, who had passed away the year before. Thankfully, they let him keep it; he was getting teared-up, just thinking about having to leave it behind.

Loranda and I had purchased wind-up watches for all of us, and we each had three on our wrists, and were told that we weren't the only ones doing such things.

After the search, Betsy was given a series of shots, and then taken to a short line of other like containers near the ship, while we were escorted to the gangway and eventually shown to our seats.

The chairs looked odd to me, as a person is closer to being in a squatting position than actually sitting, but I'm not the designer and I'm sure this design has its reasons.

Kevin and Mikey were okay with their seats, but Kyle was afraid, and I can't say I blame him. "Where is a stewardess, or whatever you call them?" I thought.

"Excuse me! Miss?" I said fairly loudly when I noticed a lady in a uniform.

She walked over and smiled patiently. "Yes?" She replied.

"Is it mandatory for each of us to sit alone, or can one of us hold little Kyle here?" I asked.

"Well, as long as I can strap him in with one of you, he should be just fine; the seats are designed with babies in mind." She answered, and then looked at our youngest son. "Kyle honey, who do you want to sit next to, your mom, or dad?"

"I want to sit with both of them." Kyle answered back.

"I'm sorry, but you have to pick one or the other."

"Huh?"

"You can only sit with your mom or dad."

"I want my mommy." Kyle answered.

"Okay honey, then come sit by me, and let daddy get buckled in like we do in the car." Loranda told Kyle.

After that, the lady, or host I guess, helped Kyle and Loranda with their straps and buckles. The host had to add some sort of head and neck support that was used for young children.

I watched as other people came in and were seated like we had been, which seemed like it took days, but when asked if I would like to go into stasis before take-off, I told our host, "No thank you". With the track record of successful take-offs, I wanted to be able to see my family as long as

possible. When everyone was finally in, or so it seemed, I looked at my watches and found that it had been only a couple of hours, maybe a few minutes more.

A short while later, I noticed several T.V. screens come down throughout my lines of vision, and an older lady, about sixty or so to look at her, appeared on the screen.

“Hello, I am Captain Hanley. I need everyone to make sure that your hands and arms are in the seating area. Your copula will not close until you have both hands around the handholds. If you are not buckled in firmly, please buckle yourselves now. If you need assistance, please press the red button near your left hand and an attendant will be with you shortly.” The screens went blank.

“Wow.” I exclaimed, watching most of the copulas closing, the plastic-like glass coming down around me, hissing a bit when it completed the cycle. The speaker must have been behind my head, for I could hear her again when she came back onto the screen. It had taken some time, as the attendants were busy helping others for several minutes first. The Captain was now seated like all of us, and I assumed that the attendants were now ready too.

“This is the Captain speaking.” She said. “We are nearly ready for lift-off. I want all personnel to you’re your stations at this time.” There was a pause while she gripped the handles in her copula, and her glass cover closed. “We are two minutes from countdown and all systems are go. I’m happy to tell you that we are much more secure than our previous attempts to launch, so you can rest assured that we are safe.” There was another short pause while the Captain read something in front of her, smiling. “Okay everyone,

hold your hand grips . . . on my count, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, zero.”

There was a rumbling from below us that you could feel in your bones. It felt like a bad earthquake to start with and then it got much worse for a few seconds, jarring the senses. It then settled into a deep roar, the feel of gravity pushing down on you. Some of those who were already in stasis shook during this time, but were secure with the belts and neck supports. As time went by, the pull of gravity lessened and the roar became a bit less, the best part was that the ship had quit shaking so much.

After only a few minutes, the Captain again appeared on the screens.

“This is your Captain speaking. We have now left Earths gravity after a successful lift-off, and are now headed toward our new home. I will leave you to watch Earth start to look smaller, while you enter stasis.” At this point, her picture switched to a view of Earth. There was also a release of cool gases into the copula that had the slightest scent of honey. “We will have a full crew on duty at all times, and next time you hear my voice . . .” Her voice was fading in my head. “We will be getttt . . .”

After the ship exited Earths atmosphere, the thrust engines turned off and the main engines took over, to propel the ship through space, toward Mandillo. This was the name of a large moon that would supposedly be habitable, though it is not possible to be perfectly sure, as it is one of three moons that orbit a Gas Giant in a solar system with two suns, and eleven confirmable planets. Mandillo itself is hard to accurately figure out size-wise, but seems to be much larger than our planet Earth.

During the eight plus decades it takes to get close to Mandillo, the crews take ten year turns at maintaining the ship. With repairs, upgrades, a few new additions, and the constant work to keep several gardens growing/harvesting, there is just enough time to relax a bit, and sleep. The artificial gravity makes things bearable, and the heat transfer units keep the ship warm, but the days (artificial light enhancement) still seem to go too slow at times. Games that were brought aboard by crew members are used to fill that boredom.

“ . . . oard automatic stasis recovery program is now active. The shipboard automatic stasis recovery program is now active. The shipboard automatic stasis recovery program is now active.”

This was the first thing I remember hearing after nodding off to sleep, after leaving Earth. The first things I felt, were the needs to drink and use the restroom, at the same time.

Still clearing the cobwebs from my brain, I noticed the screens coming down and the Captains face showing on them.

“This is your Captain speaking.” She said. “There are restrooms at the end of each aisle. If you will push the green button on your right side, your copulas will open. Be careful when you unbuckle yourselves, as you will not be as strong as you once were. Please proceed in order and in a safe manner. In front of you, you will see either a green or orange square on the seat in front of you. If it is green, then proceed left, if orange, proceed right. Those of you with small children may have them go with you if you desire. Attendants will be bringing drinks to those that are finished using the restroom, thank you for your patience.”

All around me, people were unstrapping and getting up to use the bathroom, but they seemed to be moving in slow motion. I too started unbuckling my straps, and could immediately tell that my arms and hands weren't very strong at all. Just pushing the buttons on the buckles took more effort than I could imagine. When I went to stand up, my legs felt like rubber, and I too moved in slow motion.

Now that I was standing, it was time to help Loranda and the boys. Everybody moved awkwardly, and Kyle made a statement that really fit.

"Mommy, daddy, my legs don't work, and I feel all tired."

"I know Kyle, we all feel like that." Loranda told him, and then gave me one of those looks that told me that she too, felt like she had had better days.

On our way to the bathroom, for us it was to the left, we passed a seat that didn't have its copula open, and it had a dark spray coating the inside of it. Next to it was a young lady crying, and I guessed that the person in that copula must have died in transit.

"Why is she crying?" Michael asked, pointing to the lady.

As I was getting ready to answer, Kevin said. "Because someone died in that seat."

"That's enough you two." I said, so they wouldn't make things worse, but it was too late.

"Are we going to die too?" Kyle asked as the young lady started crying harder after hearing the remarks.

"No Kyle, we will be okay for now." I answered.

"When will we die then?" Kyle seemed full of questions, and now wasn't the time.

“We don’t know when our time to die will come honey.” Loranda stepped in, trying to get him to stop asking about it.

“But why mommy?”

“Kyle, that’s enough. We’ll talk about it more at another time.” I said.

“Okay. Mommy, I gotta go pee.”

“Yes Kyle.” She said. “We are almost to the bathroom right now.”

I felt sorry for the young lady, and knew that our talking about it had made things worse; I just didn’t know what to do about it.

After we all went to the bathroom, we made our way back to our seats, thankfully, this time no one said anything. I had warned the boys before heading back, and they listened this time.

Now that I was aware of the situation, I looked around and noticed that there were other copulas that weren’t open, and other people crying. It wasn’t a large number of others who died on the way here, but it was enough to make me see that I was lucky to have my whole family alive and well.

“Hey honey.” I said to Loranda.

“Yes?” She answered, questioningly.

“Would you please go see if we can help that young lady? I would do it, but I think another lady would be better right now.”

“I was thinking the same thing.” She replied. “And it seems nobody else is trying.”

“I’ll watch the boys.” I added.

I watched her go to the girl and start talking to her. I couldn’t hear the conversation, but saw her shake her head,

and could see that she was talking to my wife between sobs, when the Captain came back on.

“This is your Captain speaking. As you may have noticed, not all of us made it without loss. My heart goes out to those of you who lost loved ones. For those that were luckier, if you would please open a place in your hearts for those who might need it, I would appreciate it very much.”

* * *

“Now tell me, how many did we lose?” Hanley asked her executive officer.

“Well, Ma’am,” he told her, “We lost one hundred and forty seven passengers, three crew members and nineteen of the pets.”

“What happened?” she asked.

“The only thing I can figure is that certain people and animals couldn’t deal with the shock to their systems,” he replied.

“The testing back on Earth gave us a forecast of only ten to twenty casualties and this is far too many. I want a full investigation, Mr. Dunbar, and I want you to do it yourself.” she told him.

“Yes Ma’am!” he answered.

“Now, how well did the ship fare?” she asked.

“I’m still waiting on some reports.” He told her. “But from what I’ve received so far, I can tell you that we lost three reactors getting here; one of which had to be jettisoned off within thirty minutes of start up. We had one viral outbreak during the fourth watch, and nearly lost two

of our tech support people. We also lost one of our garden areas due to a parasite that proved too tenacious for us to deal with. The cross breeding and DNA engineering had kept our bee colonies in good order. Honey was gathered during the trip for the wake up. We now have a limited menu for the passengers due to our losses. We weren't able to save the livestock. I'm still waiting for the why of it. As soon as I find out, I will inform you of my findings Ma'am."

"Very well, thank you for the report," she said.

* * *

Loranda and the young lady walked to where the boys and I were waiting.

"Randal, this is Elizabeth. Elizabeth, my husband Randal, and the boys are Kevin, Michael, and Kyle." She pointed to each of our sons as she named them.

"Nice to meet you." I offered my hand after getting to my feet.

"And nice to meet all of you." The young lady replied, shaking my offered hand.

"Honey, Elizabeth just lost her father, and he was all she had left of her family. She's only sixteen years old, and going to need someone to look after her, so I've invited her to join us for as long as she wants, and I'm sure you'll agree that this is the best course of action, right?"

By the tone of her voice, I knew that I really had no say in the matter. This was fine with me, as I'd have done the same thing under the circumstances.

"I wouldn't have it any other way and you know it," I replied.

"Thank you both so very much," she sobbed. "It won't be easy without my dad, but it would have been harder without a family like you."

"Does this mean she is going to be another Mommy?" Kyle asked.

"No, Kyle," I answered, "more like a big sister."

"Yeah," Kyle replied. "I never had a sister. Hey Mikey, Kevin, we got a big sister now!" Kyle was all smiles and he went over to her and gave her a big hug.

"Well, Elizabeth . . . ," said Loranda. "Welcome to the family."

"Thank you. Thank you all," she said, tears running down her face again.

"I'm sorry," Kyle announced.

"Sorry for what?" asked Elizabeth, obviously shocked.

"I make you cry again" Kyle stated. He looked like he was getting ready to cry too.

"No, little brother. Now I'm crying because I'm so happy. It's good crying I'm doing."

"Good crying?" Kyle looked confused. "Can I good crying too?" he asked.

"I'll tell you what. You can good cry with me if you want to, okay?"

"Okay." Kyle smiled, looking more confused, and hugged Elizabeth again.

* * *

"Captain?"

“Yes, Mr. Dunbar.”

“You’re not going to like this.”

“Okay, what am I not going to like?” she said.

“It’s Haquinn, Ma’am,” he answered.

“Quit giving me enough to string me along and tell me what happened!”

“Okay, but like I said, you’re not going to like it.” He replied. “Mr. Haquinn was on the 8th crew and I’ve found evidence of him hacking into the computer, selecting certain passengers and turning off their stasis program. Only sixteen deaths were accidental. It seems that Mr. Haquinn went through and found those males who had young females as their only family and shut down the units with the males in them. My guess is that he wanted the odds to be better for him to have several females looking for someone to want them.”

“That is sickening.” Captain Hanley interjected.

“I wasn’t finished yet Ma’am,” he exclaimed. “It also seems that he was directly responsible for the livestock dying as well. I can only guess that he must be doing so because of some unknown beliefs.”

“I though Mr. Haquinn was pre-screened.” Captain Hanley announced.

“So did I, but it seems he may have slipped through the cracks.”

“All right Mr. Dunbar, place him under arrest and lock him up. Let him know what he’s being charged with and I want two guards on him at all times.”

“Yes Ma’am.” Hank Dunbar replied.

“Boy, that feels better, doesn’t it guys?” I asked.

“Randal please, those boys thought they were being poisoned, by the looks they gave at the first sight of that food.” Loranda informed me.

“Well boys, you may as well learn to enjoy it as much as possible. That attendant was quite clear that the menu is very limited, and we’re lucky to have that.”

As Kevin and Michael rolled their eyes, Kyle asked. “Daddy?”

“Yes Kyle.”

“Are you going to do the big talk again?”

“Actually, now might be a good time for me to tell you guys what you can look forward to, if you are lucky enough to even have that much.”

All three of the boys put their fingers in their ears, and as I turned to my wife for support, I saw her doing the same thing. I was getting ready to say more, and Elizabeth emulated the others. The look on my face must have been priceless, because my wife started laughing at me. This started a chain reaction, and within seconds, we were all laughing. You win some, and you loose some, this time I didn’t stand a chance. It was the first good laugh we had had in almost ninety years, and we all needed it.

We had just started to quiet down again when the Captain appeared on the screens.

“Your attention please, this is your Captain speaking. As I am sure you’ve noticed, your muscles are still quite weak. Now that you have had something to eat, you should start to regain some of your strength. Walking around will also

help, and you might even meet some new friends. We will be a week or so before we arrive at our destination, so I have set up some exercise sessions in an empty storeroom, and each section will have two half hour time slots in which to use some work-out equipment, and free weights that I have had moved there for those who wish to use them. There will also be a trainer there for calisthenics, for any who want to start a little slower. The locks on your seats have been turned off, and your seats will now lean back to a more comfortable position, as they were during most of our journey to our present location. An attendant will let you know when it is your sections turn for the exercise area, and it will be the same times each day. Meet your neighbors, listen to some music from the selection available in our comp bank, with your headphones, watch the movie, or find some other peaceful way to pass the time. I will keep you updated between movies. The crew and I thank you.”

“Well people.” I said. Shall we go find out who else is here?”

“Dad, can I just stay here and listen to music?” I was asked by Kevin.

“I’m not really ready to go meet more new people just yet.” Stated Elizabeth. “So I could stay here with him, if that’s okay.”

I don’t see anything wrong with that. How about you honey?” I asked Loranda. She smiled and shook her head. “Okay you two, don’t go anywhere while we’re gone.” I hesitated. “Unless it’s to the bathroom.”

* * *

“Mr. Dunbar?”

“I’m sorry Captain Hanley. It’s just me.”

“Ah, David Hawkins, and what news might you have for me?”

“Well ma’am, I know you like things direct, so I’ll cut to the chase. The readings from Earth weren’t quite accurate. Due to the distance involved, and the two sun solar system, which are really two separate solar systems in near proximity, it was hard to receive proper readings as to the number of planets, the size of this solar system, or the atmosphere content around each rock out there. This solar system has sixteen planets of which five are mostly gases. Four more are too close to the sun and much too hot for life, three more are too far out, making them too cold. Of the four remaining planets, only two have any sort of atmosphere. With sixteen planets in the system, I would expect more than nine moons, however, that is the total of moon sized orbiters that we can find. The moon that we came to live on is habitable, and so is one of the planets. This is a rare find, as it is a one in a million shot, at least for this possibility. The problem is this, the moon we were coming here for, though its atmosphere will sustain human life, only has an area around the equator that is warm enough for vegetation to survive. This means that, even though there is enough oxygen for us to breathe, it would not sustain any large number of people and/or animals for very long. The planet here seems the better choice, as it is more Earth-like. Here again, it’s not ideal, as this planet has a slightly higher gravitational pull, and

averages five degrees hotter than Earth. I have not been able to detect any polar ice caps, and have found the oxygen count to be slightly higher than Earths. This planet is about 50-55% larger than Earth, and has a little less water surface. The main concern I have is the low amount of salt in the seas and oceans. There is significantly less, about 30% of what we are used to, I hope it's enough.

The nearby solar system is mostly blocked from our instruments by the sun that is here, so I can't tell you much about it. What I can tell you is that we are picking up another heat source from further out than that sun. This could mean, and I speculate here, that there may be a third sun in this region of space, but it would have to be pretty small, cooling off, or just getting started, let's hope it's not the last of those. It is possible that there may be other planets worth looking into, once we can get to the other side of this system." He finally finished.

"All right Mr. Hawkins, thank you for that report. I would appreciate it if you would continue to gather information while we make our approach." Hanley seemed pleased.

"Yes ma'am, I've already put my best assistants on it, and I'll be on-station as much as possible. This is the chance of a lifetime for me, and I wouldn't miss it for the world . . . , well, you know what I mean."

"I certainly do." She told him.

* * *

"What do you mean I'm under arrest? I haven't done anything wrong!" exclaimed Kazak Haquinn, Genetics Specialist on the 8th stage ship's crew.

"I will inform you of the charges against you after you are safely inside the Brigg." replied Lieutenant Commander Hank Dunbar. "I have been assigned by Captain Hanley to see to this personally, and I would appreciate it if you would come with us quietly and of your own free will."

"It doesn't look like I have much of a choice now does it?" Kazak replied.

"Not as to whether or not you are going you don't, but you can choose how you get there," Mr. Dunbar said politely.

"All right, I'm coming peacefully."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Haquinn."

* * *

"Captain Hanley?"

"Yes Mr. Hawkins?"

"There is some interference of some sort that is keeping us from obtaining anymore information about our destination."

"Are you sure of this Mr. Hawkins?" Hanley asked, concern in her voice.

"Absolutely certain ma'am." He told her. "I've checked all systems three times and get no variations in my results."

"How bad is it?"

"We still have some short range detection capabilities, we are still on course for the planet we set to, and we still have visual from the cockpit, but that's the limit of it."

"You mean all other systems are down?"

"I'm afraid so."

Hanley looked frightened. "What about landing?"

“No good, we can shut down the reactor, but we have no control over our main thrusters.”

“Life support? Tell me we have life support.”

“For now, we are okay, but things will get bad real soon.” Hawkins looked like he had to tell Joseph Stalin that Moscow had fallen.

“How soon are we talking about?”

“Days, maybe a week tops.”

* * *

“Sac City?” I asked—surprised by what I heard.

“Yup, Sac City, Iowa. Why? Have you heard of it?” Jake asked me. We had been walking around the ship, talking to others, but mostly listening, when Loranda overheard a gentleman introduce himself as Jake Crump. She was instantly interested to meet him and his family. She had known a Crump family in Lakeside, Iowa, our home town, and was acquainted with Emily Crump, who had been her hairdresser until we left.

“Oh, I’ve heard of it all right. We were living in Lakeside, Iowa until it was time to catch this ride to wherever we’re going. Heck, we’re practically neighbors.” I told him. We introduced ourselves, and in return, we found out that he and his wife, Marci, had started this journey with their nine year old son Adam, and their daughter, Silvia, age 14. All of them, except Marci, were redheads. Marci was blonde. Loranda then made the comment that she had known Emily Crump in Lakeside.

“Yup, that is, or was my brother Turl’s wife. He moved up there to work for the school and fell plumb head over heels for Emily right quick.”

I could tell that the children didn't want to listen to us "old folks" talk; so I motioned to them to go quietly play with the Crump kids. Off they went, about 10 to 15 feet away, where the Crump children were playing with a deck of cards. Loranda and I talked with the Crumps for a few hours. Kevin and Elizabeth had not wanted to play cards; so they stayed in their seats to watch movies. After each movie, the Captain would come on and we'd stop talking to hear the update and then go back to talking. Jake was a farmer since childhood. Marci was a country housewife and part time teacher. An attendant announced that it was ten minutes before our next meal; so we finished up our conversation and went back to our assigned sections. Over the next eleven days, we would become used to this routine, meet new people, chat with the Crumps, and slowly start to regain our strength.

* * *

"Murder? Sabotage?!" Kazak Haquinn raised his voice. "I didn't kill anyone or sabotage anything either. Will you tell me who I supposedly killed at least?"

"How about one hundred and thirty three men from the passengers seating—and the livestock as well?" Hank Dunbar replied.

"You've got to be kidding me! Why would I want to do something like that? How could I do something like that? Have you lost your mind?" Haquinn asked.

"I'll tell you what. Why don't you answer those very same questions for me and we'll hurry up and get this over with."

“You must really think I’d do this! This is crazy; I work my ass off for ten years, and then get revived again just to hear this *shit*. You can go to hell!

“Does that go for me as well, Mr. Haquinn?” Captain Hanley asked as she came around the corner.

“Ma’am, are you sure you should be here?” Mr. Dunbar asked in front of the prisoner. “I mean we haven’t yet ascertained what his motive was or what he hoped to get out of doing this.”

“I just can’t believe this!” he interrupted. “You really think I did this don’t you?!”

“Mr. Haquinn.” Captain Hanley stated. “We are still investigating. However, all our evidence points to you, and it’s very convincing.”

“Well, your evidence is wrong. I didn’t hurt anyone, let alone kill them! Go check my record! I’ve never been in trouble in my life!” Haquinn exclaimed vehemently.

“We’re well aware of your past. Everyone had to pass a background check to be a crew member.”

* * *

“Mr. Hawkins, come in and tell me everything is going to be okay.”

“Yes Captain, I would sure love to be able to do that.”

“But?”

“But, I can’t. The life-support system has been purposefully damaged beyond our ability to repair without weeks of time, or the proper facilities.”

“What if we put everyone back into stasis?”

“The support system controls that too, they would all die.”

“Do you have any good news for me?”

“Very little, but yes, some. We are now closing on the planet that is to become our home. With this short distance, the few systems we were able to get back online are able to give us some info about where we are headed. There is life on the planet, millions of large heat forms showing from our infrared detection. We can also tell where the vegetation is, and where the desert regions are, and have a rough map of the planet. We feel that we should land in the desert here.” He pointed to a copy of the map. “As it would give us the least life to contend with, and large open areas for viewing.”

“I don’t happen to agree with you. We will need access to water and vegetation. What is this area here?” Hanley pointed to a spot on the map with water in abundance.

“That is the start of a mountainous region, and it is full of heat signatures, thousands of whatever they are congregate there.” Hawkins replied with worry.

“That’s because life stays next to good water, and that is where we will go.”

“Yes ma’am, I will do what I can to get us there. By the way, we will be on our final approach within the hour.”

“Do well, Hawkins.”

* * *

As the ship was readying to enter the atmosphere, the computers and sensors that were on-line, went out. With all systems down, the ship became a nearly unguided missile.

“Gloria!” Hank Dunbar exclaimed. “We have no comps, sensors, or thrust engines. If we don’t get our thrust engines online in the next couple of minutes, we will have traveled all this way to die in an uncontrolled crash!” You could hear the severe distress in his voice.

“I’m well aware of our situation, and have the bulk of our crew working on it already.” Captain Hanley replied. “And I’ve been told that we should have control before getting too close to the surface, and please remember to call me Captain Hanley, now my name will be known, and I shall have to correct others.”

“Sorry ma’am, I wasn’t thinking about names.”

“I do understand Mr. Dunbar.” She said. “Now, I need to get back to the bridge and try to fly this crate.”

* * *

“This is the Captain, all hands prepare for a crash landing, everybody strap into your chairs, NOW, this is not a drill.”

* * *

Captain Hanley was now on the bridge, Mr. Dunbar was with her.

“How about just landing with manual override?” Hanley asked him.

“If we can get the thrust engines online, we may still have a chance, but nothing is working. It’s like someone doesn’t want us to land at all, ma’am.”

"Yeah, well, we are already within the gravitational pull of the planet. We're going down one way or another, so we need to do something, and fast. Any ideas?"

"None. Wait, I may have one, but I'm doubtful it will help."

"It's better than what I've got, which is nothing." The Captain looked disgusted with herself.

"If we could use . . ."

* * *

"I'm sorry ma'am." Said David Hawkins. They are both at full power, and locked to the bottom of the ship to get the full possible effect, it's all we're going to get."

"Miss Bendt?"

"Yes ma'am?"

"That's all the help you're going to get, what can you tell me?" Captain Hanley asked.

"If by some miracle we don't die, my brains will be scrambled, and I'll have to have my arms sewn back on from all the shaking, but there's a chance that some of us might come out of this alive. Then again, I could be wrong, I just don't know."

"Give me a percentage Sandra, and don't sugar-coat it for me."

"Five percent, maybe ten, max."

"Is it really that bad?"

"I was being optimistic, due to my belief in my superb abilities to make craft do what I want."

"Do well Sandra, and then double it, please."

“Captain, I’ve already surpassed that a long time ago, now I’m trying to stay alive.”

“How close to our original landing sight will we be?”

“Sorry ma’am, we’re not going to be anywhere near the LZ that was chosen. We’re going down between the nearest two ridges of the mountains north of what you wanted, into what I can only describe as a large forest of some sort.”

“Well, at least the trees might help cushion our fall to some extent.”

“Sorry Captain, but that’s comparable to landing on a rock with a jacket on it. It may not cut as much skin, but you’ll probably break the bone.” The pilot stated. “Okay! Everyone brace yourselves, thirty seconds to impact and coming in way too fast.”

Captain Hanley pushed the button on the intercom. “All hands brace for impact in 10, 7, 4, 1.”

The ship hit the vegetation and snapped trunks like twigs, the underside of the ship opened like a soda can being dragged across upturned nails. Pieces of the ship littered the path of destruction left by the huge metal monster from Earth.

Along with the damage to the ship and forest, was the carnage done to several beings that weren’t aware of the danger on its way, or able to avoid the being crushed by such a large, heavy, and hard monstrosity. Never before had such a thing happened to these beings, and there were some who survived, only to find that they had lost loved ones, creating an immediate hatred toward this bringer of death.

“Are we alive?” Sandra Bendt asked.

“Must be,” answered Captain Hanley. “I feel too much pain to possibly be dead!”

“Not if we’re in hell. It feels like the devil’s having fun beating on me.”

“Well, I won’t argue with that. Now, let’s see what the damage is. Mr. Hawkins . . . ?” The Captain waited a second before calling again on her com unit. “Mr. Hawkins, can you hear me?” she asked.

“Captain, Dunbar here,” was the answer that came through the personal com unit. “Hawkins can’t hear anyone anymore. Sorry.”

“Damn it! This just isn’t right. We come all this way, just to have everything fall apart at the end of all this work!” Captain Hanley hesitated.

“All right people, let’s find out what we’ve got. I want reports in ten minutes. All medical staff is to start helping the injured. Let’s move like we have a purpose.”

* * *

“Oh, my aching neck. Who do I sue for whiplash?” I asked of no one in particular as I walked toward my family.

“I don’t know,” I heard my wife Loranda say, “but sign me up too. I think it’ll be a class action suit.”

“Mommy, I got owies,” Kyle, our youngest, informed us, then proceeded to show us some bumps and forming bruises.

Michael, our middle child, was just mumbling under his breath. Elizabeth, a recent addition to our family through

adoption, was shaking her head—what appeared to be her way of shaking out the cobwebs.

However, it was Kevin, our eldest, who needed attention. He was unconscious, had a large bump on his forehead, and was bleeding out of his nose. An attendant was nearly finished helping another passenger; so I asked if she would look at Kevin for me.

“As soon as I’m finished here,” she replied, “If I don’t splint this leg correctly, then it won’t heal properly.” Cassandra Knox, the attendant, informed me.

“Is there anything I can do to help?” I asked.

“Yes, please,” she answered. “You can hold this splint while I wrap it up nice and tight.” I was already climbing over the mid-section between two of the seats so I could help her.

“This will make the job quicker and I can do a much better job of it, too,” she finished.

“Randal Wagner,” I introduced myself. “How do you want me to hold this?”

“Use equal pressure here, here and here,” she demonstrated. “I’ve already reset the bone as well as I can. The rest is up to the body and this splint.”

We spent the next couple of minutes working together, and then she said, “Sorry. I’m Cassandra—Casi for short. Thank you for the help. Now let’s take a look at your son. I’m sure it will be a long day today.”

“I’ll tell you what. I’ll come around and help you. I’m no Doctor, but I can hold a splint,” I told her.

“I could use the help, but you’d better clear it with your wife first,” she told me as we neared Kevin’s seat.

Having heard the conversation, Loranda looked at me and said, "If you hadn't offered, I'd have said something about it myself. I'll keep watch over the kids, and I have Elizabeth to help me. As soon as you see to Kevin, go help those who need it." Her tone let me know that the decision was final, and I know when *not* to argue with her.

Cassandra examined Kevin and stated, "He should be okay. He has a mild concussion and his head will be sore for a few days. You were smart to catch the bleeding from his nose. It will be easier on him to not see all the blood. If I get the chance, I'll bring him a clean shirt later. Get him to drink plenty of water as soon as possible. Mrs. Wagner, thank you for letting me acquire the help of your husband. She motioned for Randal to follow."

"Call me Randy, please, it'll save time." I told her as we were walking to the next person that needed help.

"Very well then, Randy. What medical training do you have?"

"Not much, just some first aid I learned as a teenager."

"It's better than nothing, come on," Cassandra said.

* * *

All over the ship, similar scenarios were unfolding. The lower the level of seating, the worse the injuries, this was true especially on the lowest two levels, where pieces of the shuttles were imbedded into the underside of the ship. Several tree trunks and pieces of angle iron also came through the ship at various angles, causing a lot more deaths and injuries than otherwise would have happened.

Some were lucky enough to instantly die, while others would spend hours dying in agony. It wasn't a pretty sight. One could hear the screams, moans and crying everywhere on those last two levels along with smelling the stench of urine, blood, and excrement. The hardest emotions to deal with came from seeing the young children. One mother was found holding her seven year old son, preventing him from looking down, where a steel beam had opened his ribcage, flaying back muscle and bone to reveal his inner organs, still working to keep him alive for as long as possible. The boy was in a state of shock, yet he managed to stay alive for almost an hour. His brother, sister and father had died within minutes, while his mom only had a broken arm and some bumps and bruises. None of it made sense. There were people with barely a scratch, sitting in shock, right next to others with horrible injuries or killed in terrible ways.

It wasn't only the passengers who suffered. There had been attendants who were thrown into bulkheads or impaled by various pieces of debris while trying to calm some of the passengers. Two valiant men attempted to control the landing by using remotes from the lowest level of the ship. Due to the extreme short range of the remotes set up that were jury-rigged from scratch the two crewmen had to stay in the lowest level of the ship. These remotes were connected to the two shuttle craft that came standard with the ship. Those two men knew that they were sacrificing themselves in the hopes that they would save the many.

There were a few holes etched out of the lower levels; so the living needed to be brought up to higher levels. Afterwards, the lower levels were sealed off.

In the beginning, there was too much to do inside the ship to worry about going outside. It was now becoming necessary to look to the outside world, as the stench of death and the decaying bodies started to produce a concern for the health of the living.

* * *

“So . . . ,” was the thought of a mid-aged Utah raptor. “It seems that many of these creatures from the sky cave have found death already. Good, they will be put to good use as food.”

The Raptor went from one new creature to another, while making his way toward the ship that had crash landed in *his* valley.

“Yep, they all seem to be dead. Too bad, I could use some fun to cheer me up right now.” He looks at the ship.

“Hey, there are some holes in the side, maybe I can fit into some of them and look around.”

* * *

There were a few holes strewn about in the lower levels, so the living were brought up to the higher levels, the lower ones being sealed for security reasons. Unfortunately, there was one young girl that had been overlooked, due to all the blood on her from others, and being unconscious. Somebody hadn't found her pulse.

“Where is everyone?” A young girl of eleven years thought to herself upon opening her eyes. “Hello?! Can anybody hear me?” she asked aloud.

Unseen, a shape dropped down lower and moved toward the source of the noise.

“Somebody help me! Is everyone dead?” The girl asked the second part in a lower tone.

Something flashed by between a couple of stasis units.

“Hello?” The girl again raised her voice. “Who’s there? I’m stuck in this chair. I need help getting out!”

She saw a dinosaur jump in front of her, mouth open, teeth glimmering in the faint light. Her stomach turned at the smell of death and decay, and she could see bits of flesh stuck between its teeth. With only a couple of seconds left in her life, her senses were overwhelmed.

Why had no one prepared her for such an outcome? Why had nobody saved her? What kind of a world had the ship crashed on?

Her mind running a mile a minute, she could find no way out of her predicament. Scared beyond reason, she did the only thing she could think of—she screamed!

“Well, well . . .,” the Raptor thought, “that wasn’t bad at all; in fact, it was down right fun.”

* * *

“Captain Hanley, I’ve finally been able to get a confirmation on a casualty list.”

“Proceed, Mr. Dunbar.”

“Total dead are 2,438 passengers and crew, another 4,192 injured, of which 200 to 300 hundred are critical and not likely to live. The other half of the passengers and crew has sustained bumps and bruises, with occasional small lacerations. All in all, it could have been better and it could have been much worse.”

“How about supplies?” she asked.

“I can tell you that we are using the medical supplies much more quickly than expected. I don’t yet know much else. Our crews, along with a few volunteers from the passengers, have been working constantly for about 48 hours and need rest before they drop.”

“All right. Announce a need for some volunteers and let the others get some food and sleep; I could use some myself. Several hours from now, we will venture outside and see what we have.”

“Yes Ma’am.”

* * *

After two straight days of helping the injured, moving bodies and helping to clean up blood and other bodily waste, I felt ready to sleep standing up if need be. Luckily, this wasn’t the case. We were allowed to take a shower, though the water was cold, eat and get some sleep. Though I probably wouldn’t have heard them if they were noisy, Loranda kept the children quiet as much as possible. Our family had again grown, as she took in three more of the survivors from below. The youngest was a boy named, Marcus, at only three years old. He had lost his mother, father and one of his two sisters.

His one surviving sister, Latisha, was also with us. Both of them had stitches and Latisha had a broken left wrist. Latisha was twelve years old and still not very responsive to anyone other than her brother. Our other new arrival was a young lady named Cindy. Though she was 19 years old, with only minor bumps and cuts, she had lost her entire family when the forward most shuttle crashed through the ship's 3rd level. Her escape from death was only by a couple of feet, but she still had the vision of death in her. She did help Loranda and Elizabeth with the younger children, but she would withdraw into her memories on occasion.

It started to seem as if the Crumps would also outgrow their family, as they too had taken in a few others with similar stories. Jake had also helped with the injured for a while, but he was not able to keep working straight through and had to sleep on a couple of occasions. Because of this, he was now able to care for the more critically injured while others obtained some much needed rest. The Crumps had asked those in front of us if they could trade seating assignments and had been told yes. This now put us all in a sort of tribal grouping. The Crumps and my family both got along with a family from Wyoming, the Sanders. We invited them to join our group as well. Bill and Donna Sanders started this trip with one 14 year old boy, William, Jr., and have now added three young children as well as a widowed father and his son. Dave and Eric Sinclair lost Doloris in the crash and that loss was devastating to both father and son. Tammy, Beth and Susie McCalister, who lost both of their parents, rounded out this bunch. It seemed a little strange that we all were families willing to take on extra responsibilities, and had no racial preference to those we

brought in. But I think these common qualities are what bound us together in the first place. We noticed several families that were unwilling to do anything for others in need and made their own situations seem much worse than they were. I guess some people have their own issues to deal with.

* * *

Two hours before it was time to see what lay beyond the doors of the ship, Captain Hanley was awakened by Mr. Dunbar, as per her request. Though haggard and still showing signs of fatigue, she felt that she could at least function again. She would have loved another hour and a half of sleep, but there was work to be done.

“Dunbar?” Captain Hanley asked.

“Ma’am?” he answered simply.

“How much sleep did you get?” she asked.

“Just over eight hours,” he replied.

“Same here, though I feel like I took a short nap. You look like you have something on your mind. Would you like to talk about it?”

“Well it’s the matter with Kazak, Ma’am.”

“Tell me what happened,” she said.

“I’ll start from the beginning . . .,” Dunbar replied.

Dunbar finished his tale.

“What’s wrong with that? Why would that bother you?” asked Captain Hanley.

“There was a complete turnaround in his attitude when I informed him of the charges. It was as if he really believed he was innocent.” Dunbar told her.

“Yes, Mr. Dunbar, I do remember after I stepped in that he did seem quite upset,” she appeared thoughtful.

“It just seemed he felt so strongly about it, and I keep running the scenario over in my head,” said Dunbar.

“We’ll find out the truth. Now is there anything new I should know about?” asked Hanley.

“Actually, yes. Mr. Rupart was found dead at the circuit boxes. It seems he was working on trying to get us back online and was electrocuted to death. I have a team working on it now.”

“Rupart wasn’t an electrician; he was our supply expert for 8th crew, wasn’t he?”

“Yes, he was. I’m having an autopsy done on him if we can get power back on. The batteries are nearly out.”

“Good, anything else?” she asked.

“I’ve been told that we lost nearly all our food supplies as they were mostly stored in the lowest level. Normally, it would have been enough for a year. Now we have the equivalent of about six days for a full ship. The good news, if you can call it that, is that due to the loss of life, we can feed the remaining passengers for seven or eight days. We still have about half of the seeds from the plants that were kept going on our way here, but feeding these people until we can grow enough fruits, vegetables and grains to sustain them will be a major problem.”

“How about the gardens?” asked the Captain.

“The botanists are working to try and salvage what they can, but I’ve had no word as of yet.”

“And the armories?” She gave him a stern look.

“The lower armory is gone, the upper armory is intact as far as we can tell; though without power, you are the only one that can access it.”

“Sorry Dunbar, I’m still not 100% yet. What about the passengers’ possessions? Those should be okay if I’m not mistaken?”

“That’s correct. They were in the rear storerooms with the pets and have come through fine. We did lose more of the pets, but most are awake and healthy.”

“What about food for the animals?” Hanley was starting to feel the fatigue grow.

“They have the original allotment minus the feedings for the past week. We could feed them for at least a year with just what is produced in the ship. The stasis storeroom for the pet food contains enough for a little over two years.”

“It was wise to put stasis fields around the bulk of everything we carried. Now I know how we can feed these people if we come to it. They won’t like eating dog and cat food, but they will like going hungry even less. Okay, here’s the plan . . .”

About 15 minutes after Captain Hanley’s plan was spelled out, the power came on in the ship. She was on the screens within less than a minute.

“This is the Captain speaking,” she began. “I’m sure that you are all well aware that we have crash landed close to our destination and that we have suffered many casualties. My deepest sympathies go to all who have lost loved ones. Due to our situation, we must find out what awaits us beyond these walls. Before we get started, I want to thank those of you that have been so helpful since landing. I need all available ship personnel and those who helped them to come to the 06 level as soon as I finish this briefing. The exceptions are those doctors and nurses with the badly

injured and the badly injured themselves. Very shortly, we will be giving back your family possessions and pets. For those who lost their families, you will receive the same which will be yours if you want. There will be additional supplies given to each family, which will be the allotment we can give. If there are any survivors without families, please report to the 05 level now. Thank you all very much.” The screens went black again.

“Well, Mr. Wagner, Mr. Crump, please join me in a stroll,” Casi suggested.

The three of us went to the 06 level as requested and were asked to stay in a large meeting room and have a seat. It took us all a few minutes to get everyone in and seated, yet there were still many empty seats left. After a couple of minutes, the Captain walked in and stood behind the podium. She nodded to the man standing next to her . . .

“Ladies, gentlemen,” she started, “This is Mr. Dunbar, my Executive Officer. He will be taking down passenger names. Now, I need to know how many of you have military experience.” I put my hand up with a few others.

“What branch?” she moved from one person to the next and Mr. Dunbar took notes.

“What did you do there?” was her next question. Again, the notes.

“What firearms experience do you have?” She went down the list again.

“Any background information you want to share?” At this question, only myself and one other raised their hands.

“You.” She pointed to the other gentleman. “Give a brief description.”

“I was a Highway Patrolman for six years after I got out of the service,” he said.

“And you?” she turned toward me.

“I was an eagle scout. I used to study maps. I’m a fairly good military tactician and strategist, I studied survival and can drive most heavy machinery, not that the latter will help much.” I told her.

“Very good you two.” she told us. “Now, what skills do the rest of you have?” she asked the others.

Mr. Crump, and a couple of others were the farmers, and all three claimed to be excellent marksmen. Others had attained various ranks in Boy Scouts, and one other also claimed to be a tactician. There were also a few that had medical experience or some sort of firearm background.

When it came to the end of the meeting, we were asked about construction knowledge. Here, there were many of us who could build what was needed, but only a few real specialists. This seemed to be all we were to be asked for now. Mr. Dunbar then had us line up in order from his list. After lineup, the Captain asked each of us how many were in our families. Crump was the second person asked; he pointed to me and Casi and informed her that we were an organized group that I had put together, and that there were presently over twenty of us of different ages and ethnic backgrounds. This must have seemed odd to her as she looked at Casi, who said, “Yes Ma’am. That’s the truth of it. My husband and I liked these people so much that we joined them.” Hanley then finished with the rest of the line up—skipping me.

“Very well,” she said and wrote something on Mr. Dunbar’s paperwork. Then she spoke into her com-unit microphone attached to her ear, listened for a minute and smiled. She looked at me and asked, “Mr. Wagner?” How would you like a few more lost souls?”

“That’s fine by me,” I told her. “The more the merrier.”

“Good, I have a group downstairs, that I’d like you to take with you.”

“Consider it done.” I told her. Then she wrote some more on Mr. Dunbar’s paperwork. Dunbar gave her a look of shock but said nothing.

“Okay, Casi, Mr. Wagner, and Mr. Crump,” the Captain called to us. “Come with me please. Mr. Dunbar, give us a few minutes. I’ll call you when I’m done.”

“Yes Ma’am,” he said.

After we rounded a corner and went down a hallway, the Captain again started speaking. “Mr. Wagner, you seem to have accomplished what I could only wish the rest of humanity would do. You have taken on as much, or more, as I myself have done. Because of this, I am going to give you and your group two very special additions. The first is my granddaughter. I feel that you people have the best chance to make a good community and teach her your qualities. The second addition for your group is first choice of the limited weapons supply that we brought with us. I will be leading another large group and have taken half of the heavy weapons out already, along with enough small arms for my personnel that will be with me. So, select what you can handle.”

“How many able bodied, or soon to be, shooters above the age of 12 will we be adding to our group, as you say it?” I asked her.

“I knew you would probably ask something like that, though I figured an age of 15. To answer your question, there are nine children fifteen or older, and, I think, one or two more from 12 to 14.” Hanley answered.

“Depending on what you have available, versus the amount of others in need, I may or may not need some help carrying the equipment.” I told her.

“Two of the older girls are already taking the younger children to a storeroom where I have had your party reassigned for special concerns. As I speak, the rest are on their way here, escorted by two of my crew members.”

She then led us around another corner, and we could see roughly a dozen people coming from the other end of the hall and an open door close to us.

“Here is Mr. Burns, my armorer.” She announced as we entered a small room. “He will assist you in any way he can. If you have any questions that he can’t answer, he will get a hold of me.”

“Thank you very much Captain.” I told her gratefully.

“Just a second.” she raised a finger. She touched her com unit. “Okay, I’ll ask.” She then looked at me. “Mr. Tidwell, the other gentleman who claimed to be a strategist, thinks he might be better suited to lead than you. What do you say, Mr. Wagner?”

“He can lead whoever wants to follow him. There are far more than enough people here than one person can lead anyway.” I told her.

Captain Hanley pointed to a large rifle, the likes to which I had never seen. She also pointed to a pair of mini Uzis and then pointed in my direction as she walked out of the room.

I was then allowed to go in and look around. I don't know what I was expecting, but it wasn't this. There were racks on every wall and stand up racks bolted to the floor and ceiling in the middle of the room as well. Nearly all of them were crammed full of various weapons. There must have been a couple hundred in all. I knew I couldn't deplete this room, as I had been told that this was the only armory that survived the crash, the other one having been lost. So, I looked around, talked with Mr. Burns and ended up with an assortment of weapons that I thought would work for our group. He then went into an explanation about the large rifle I had seen earlier as he handed it to me.

"This is a 25 mm anti-tank rifle," the armorer started, "It can take out all but the most heavily armored vehicles back on Earth. This round," he showed me the first of two, "defeats the armor, and then explodes inside the vehicle in a shower of white phosphorous and C-12 plastic explosive—killing all living beings inside. This second kind imparts solid mass and sends a jet of molten metal that burns its way through the armor," he continued, "We started this journey with four of these bad boys, but we lost two in the crash."

He pointed at two briefcase-like containers of ammo. "Here is half the ammo for them. The other half goes with the other rifle. It has a standard three round magazine up the well and two more in this harness along with two 5-round

extended mags. I've already loaded the mags. Please be careful when firing this thing. It has a hell of a kick if you don't brace it. In an emergency one of these rounds will take out a six to ten foot deep section of rock with a twelve foot radius; but try not to waste the ammo. Do you have any questions for me?" he asked. I shook my head.

"No? Good. I appreciate those who listen."

Mr. Burns asked why I didn't take a larger assortment of weaponry. I told him that others would need the necessary equipment to protect them too. The weapons were handed out and a pallet jack with an empty pallet on it was brought to the doorway. It was loaded with cases of ammo and several boxes of cleaning and lubing supplies. As everyone was led to a service elevator, the armorer held me back.

"Look," he said. "You must be someone special for the Captain to bring you here first and personally. She wanted you to take these." He handed me a small revolver in holster and three boxes of .38 shells. "And these . . . ," he then handed me a pair of mini Uzis and a Musset bag full of mags. "The Uzis are your badge of office. The pocket gun is for emergencies against those who might want to take your place. Show it to no one unless needed," he told me, and then waved me off with, "Good luck to you."

"Thank you." I told him. Then I took off to catch up with the others.

It seemed like we had plenty of firearms, but I knew different. Ammo would become scarce very quickly, and when it was gone, there would be no more. I put the boxes of shells in my pockets, along with the .38 and jumped

into the elevator that was being held for me. The mini Uzis were noticed, and I quickly explained about them on the way down.

We were escorted via a different route to a storeroom where the rest of our party now resided and introductions were required. Though our group was far too large for me to keep up with all the names, I did make myself remember “Angie Krous”—the Captain’s granddaughter.

Completing our party were three dogs, “Betty”, our German shepherd; “Dox”, a Great Dane that belonged to the Crumps, and “Rover”, Cindy’s Black Labrador. Along with our canine friends, there were also a large number of suitcases and family boxes.

Even after stacking our pallet as high as it would go, we still had enough luggage to weigh everyone down. It wouldn’t be proper to make some leave their possessions behind and not enact the same for others. It might be the only time we could bring part of our world with us; we didn’t want to leave anything behind. We just didn’t know what to do yet.

* * *

It was evening when I bumped into Captain Hanley in the hallway and decided to go ahead and ask her some questions that were on my mind.

“Captain Hanley?” I asked.

“Yes, Mr. Wagner.”

“I have two requests, maybe three.”

“Ask away.”

“Number one, how about we send one or two scout parties out before sending the others?”

“That’s a good idea. I’m guessing you want to lead one of those parties?”

“Yes, Ma’am,” I told her.

“Next?” she smiled.

“Okay, number two . . . I take my group behind the ship, back the way we came.”

“There is less cover in that direction, but you are welcome to it, is that it?” she asked.

“No, I was wondering if there was some sort of transport for the extra items we have from so many families.”

“I’m sorry, but the best I can do is give you another pallet jack and pallet.”

“That would help immensely,” I told her.

“I’ll have it delivered within half an hour,” I was told.

I told her thank you and headed back to our storeroom.

When the other pallet jack arrived it had three family boxes and a dozen or so extra suitcases on it. The crewman who brought it handed me a note from the Captain and left.

Dear Mr. Wagner,

I know not the contents of these boxes and cases, but they are from some crew members and families that did not make it. I do know that the luggage for the crew was not inspected and was not going to be. The crew was also allowed an extra case each, and I know that at least one family was intent on

survival. I hope this added gear will help you to protect my granddaughter. I will await you at the third level exit at the bell tone from the intercom.

Thank you, good luck, and God-speed sir.

Gloria Hanley

“All right people, listen. I want these two pallets secure and equally distributed as much as possible. Those with weapons, I want them checked twice. No rounds in the chamber and all on single shot only. Mr. Crump? If you will join me, we have some scouting to do.”

Jake and I had already geared up. He had the .50-cal sniper rifle and a .357 revolver, including an assortment of knives, of which one was more like a short sword—an Arkansas toothpick he called it. I had the M-16/M203 combo; my Uzis; a .45-cal auto; a katana; a bayonet for the M-16 and the little .38 that was hidden. The two of us had been given battle harnesses, bullet proof vests and military helmets, as well as com units. Along with my Musset bag and canteen, I felt like I weighed twice as much as before. I would sure be putting my muscles to the test today, I thought.

We had fallen way behind schedule. We were supposed to have been outside over seven hours ago, and we were just now getting ready to open the doors for the first time. Jake and I reached the exit before the Captain and before the bell tone signaled those of the two scouting parties to get to station.

When we were all ready, the Captain opened the doors and our first sight was darkness – near pitch black and you could not see the ground.

“It’s rather dark,” Captain Hanley said. “Do you think it wise to go out at this point and time? I rather think not, myself. Everyone go back to your families and get some sleep. We’ll come back when it’s light out.” Her tone left no room for argument.

As we were starting to close the door and head back in, we all heard a deep roaring coming from somewhere in the surrounding area that sent chills down my spine.

Chapter 2

BACK AT THE storeroom Jake and I found that, yes, another pallet had been dropped off. This one was clearly over stacked with six layers of 50 lb bags of dog food, and two layers-of 30 lb bags of cat food.

“What the hell is this?” I asked.

Loranda told me, “This is our emergency food supply. It’s all we’re bound to get; so we shouldn’t leave it behind.”

“I don’t see another pallet jack anywhere,” I responded.

“That’s because they don’t have one to spare yet. I was told that we might get one more, after they are finished handing out emergency food to everyone else. “

“I sure hope so, or it stands to reason that we go hungry.”

“So, tell me honey, what’s it like out there?”

“Loranda, it’s dark—real dark. We couldn’t even see the ground,” I told her. “And it’s . . . scary.”

“Anything else?” she asked. “You don’t look quite right.”

“Yeah,” I whispered. “Something’s not quite right. We heard this sound that I’ve never heard before, yet seems so familiar. I could feel eyes on me and the sound . . . the sound was E.V.I.L. It made my skin crawl, and we didn’t even leave the ship.”

“Randal, that doesn’t sound like you, and you’re scaring me.”

“Good, be scared. It might help keep you alive,” I told her. “I wouldn’t go telling the others just yet.” Loranda took a step back.

* * *

“Mr. Haquinn!” Dunbar exclaimed. “This is ridiculous. Why won’t you tell me what you were doing breaking into restricted files on the computer while you were supposed to be working?”

“I keep trying to tell you, I didn’t do it! The timing isn’t even right. I was always in my room by 2200 hours, and this hacking, as you call it, was done at 2330. You need to check the ship’s records. They will prove my innocence.”

“He may be right,” Ernest Graft, the best computer expert on the ship’s command, spoke up.

“What are you talking about, Ernie?” Dunbar asked.

“There is a discrepancy in the camera shots, like they’ve been re-recorded to hide what really happened.”

“Can you elaborate on that?” asked Mr. Dunbar.

“Not yet, but give me an hour and I should have the cover-up removed and show what really happened.”

“All right, you’ve got your hour, Ernie. I’ll be back in a few minutes with his food.” Dunbar looked at Haquinn,

“You stay quiet, unless asked. Do you hear me?” Haquinn nodded his head, but stayed quiet.

When Dunbar came back with Haquinn’s food, he found Captain Hanley watching what Ernest had recovered. “What?” Dunbar asked. “Done already?”

Ernie explained, “Mr. Rupert stood behind Haquinn as he entered his pass code into the computer. As you can see here, he is writing it down.” He pointed to a scene on the computer, “The next day, we can see Haquinn going to his room at 2147 hours. Then there’s the recording of Rupert using Haquinn’s pass code to access the computer, which led to the hacking of the system and the crimes committed afterwards. Rupert tried to cover up all record of his movements, but wasn’t able to completely erase them. I was able to uncover them. I’ve also got him shutting down our systems before our entry into the atmosphere.”

“This all makes sense now,” Captain Hanley stated. “I was just down in the infirmary looking at the autopsy reports and there was a dual microchip behind the base of Rupert’s skull. It was fried when he was electrocuted. It must have been implanted during our family gathering leave. I hope this was a one time problem or every ship could be sabotaged as ours was. Dunbar, please let Mr. Haquinn out of the Brigg.”

“Yes Ma’am,” Dunbar answered. “Sorry Haquinn, I had to do my job. I hope you understand.”

“Oh, I understand. Now here’s something I hope you understand,” he turned toward the Captain, “I’d like to be away from Dunbar when it’s time to leave Captain!”

“A little animosity, Haquinn?” Captain Hanley asked. Before Haquinn could answer, she said, “Very well, I happen

to have the perfect group for you. Dunbar, take him by my stateroom and give him the items on my desk. Then release his goods and have them taken, along with him and his wife, to the Wagner room.”

“Yes Ma’am.” Dunbar replied, and led Haquinn to Captain Hanley’s stateroom. When he was done there Dunbar escorted the couple to the Wagner group storeroom.

When Haquinn and his wife arrived at the storeroom that had become known as the “Wagner Room”, Jake and I were asleep; so the Haquinn couple was introduced to the others that were still awake. A few minutes later, their belongings and their dog, Jessie, a beautiful collie, were brought in to join the group. After that, it was a waiting game again with the only break being at meal time.

About nine hours after the failed attempt to scout the outside world, Jake and I were awakened to get ready again. This time I called Captain Hanley on the com unit and made sure it was daylight before getting excited. She told me that the one working camera, though mostly blocked by foliage, did show it to be light outside. Jake and I met our new members, grabbed a bite to eat, then went back to the exit.

“Okay people, look sharp,” Captain Hanley requested. “Mr. Dunbar, let’s open those doors.”

As the doors opened, light seeped into the ship, so did the stench of death. The smell had been in the ship, even though the bodies had been moved to empty storerooms and sealed. This smell was much stronger. With the doors opening ever wider, we were able to see human bodies littered on the

ground below us. These bodies were missing limbs or heads and many were torn in half. The most disturbing part was how much of the bodies were just gone and that the bodies must have been dragged out of the lower portion of the ship which had been sealed off. Amongst the dead bodies were creatures I thought I would never see in living form.

“Raptors!” I thought—living, breathing and eating Raptors!

“How on earth could they . . . wait, we’re not on Earth,” I thought, then forced myself into action. I looked down at one of the Raptors (about 40 feet down), aimed for the head and pulled the trigger of my M-16. The shot was accurate; I could tell by the blood spatter, but it didn’t seem to do anymore than make the Raptor angry. All of them jumped from the foreign sound. I fired again, this time aiming behind the lower leg, as a few others took shots as well. The Raptor I shot made a hideous noise as it fell to the ground. Another Raptor came over and picked it up in its mouth and took off running into the trees—like the rest of them. Some of the scouts discussed their shots and their dismay at the lack of apparent damage done. About 40 rounds of ammo were used—and not one dead Raptor.

This was going to take some thinking. We all decided to go back inside and close the doors until we could reorganize.

“Captain Hanley?” I asked.

“Yes, Mr. Wagner.”

“How about we get Jake to try that .50-cal on one of those next time?”

“It’s certainly worth a try. What do you think, Mr. Crump? Are you up to it?”

“I’m more than ready now. As I’ve never seen anything like that before, I was just caught off guard.” he answered sheepishly.

“I’ll have the other two marksmen with the .50-cals come up here before we try this again.”

“Good thinking Captain.” I told her.

It only took about ten minutes to have all three of our sharpshooters ready to try their best.

“Third time’s the charm!” the Captain proclaimed. “Dunbar, open those doors and let’s see what we’ve got.”

The doors opened, but not one Raptor was in sight. We looked around but could not detect any movement anywhere.

“I don’t like this,” stated Jake. “They should have come back again to eat by now.”

“Come on Jake,” I said, “We’re no more knowledgeable about their habits then they are ours.”

“True, but I still don’t like it.”

* * *

Two Toe heard guns being fired. “What was that? Some kind of loud noise, and it hurts my sound receptors. It came from up there. Hey, those are more of those nasty beings that killed my family. What’s short snout complaining about? Ouch, there are a lot of those sounds and short snout fell down. I’d better get him and I out of here before my sound receptors quit working.”

“Let’s get out of here now. Okay, Short Snout is hurt, and I need to move him fast.”

“I’ve got you Short Snout; don’t worry. Run and run fast!”

Into the trees the Raptors ran. After a short sprint, they stopped. The injured Raptor was set down easily.

“Guys, what happened? Short Snout . . . are you okay?”

“I feel like a three horn stabbed me and forgot to pull his horn out.” Short Snout announced. “By the way, thank you for picking me up, Two Toe. I don’t know what happened, but I don’t want it to happen again.”

“It had to be those new live foods. There was nothing else around.” Mentioned One Eye, so named because of an accident when she was a child.

“Don’t be so sure One Eye, I thought I smelled a trap mouth on his way. We should have left earlier. At least we know there are more of those new live foods in the hard cave from the sky.”

“Yeah, well, they are going to have to be left alone for now. We have to get Short Snout away from here before Trap Mouth gets here and smells him.

“Why don’t we just get rid of the trap mouth? There are more than enough of us to take him out.”

“And if he has family with him?” Two Toe asked.

“All right, let’s get out of here.”

* * *

“Do you hear something?” I asked those on the exit platform.

“Shhh,” someone said.

“It sounds like drums,” whispered Captain Hanley.

“Well, they sure are slow, but closing fast.” I whispered back. Then I saw movement to our left—by the front of the ship. “Everyone inside and close the doors!” I said as I ran. I never saw people move so quickly in my life, and it seemed to take forever for the doors to close.

“What was that?” I asked.

“That was a T-Rex.” Jake answered.

“If it was, then it’s the largest one I’ve ever seen, I mean heard of,” I corrected myself. “That thing had to be at least 30 feet tall. I thought T-Rex never grew to be more than 20–25 feet tall.”

“I don’t know, but that had all the T-Rex features except size.” Captain Hanley stated.

“I’ll be back in a few minutes. Don’t go anywhere.” It took me about six minutes to get the .25 mm and the four extra magazines and come back.

“Okay, I want everyone to stay quiet and out of sight. When the doors open, I want to be the only target available.” I told them. Funny, it wasn’t hard to get them to listen to me this time.

“Okay,” I whispered, “Open the doors.” As the doors opened, I held my breath, looked around the corner and saw a T-Rex bent over eating the dead bodies from the ground. I had already chambered a round on the way up here, so my only job now was to sneak around the back, so to speak.

The opening doors must have caught the corner of T-Rex’s vision, or maybe his sense of smell, catching a whiff of me. Either way, he turned his head towards me as I was starting to aim. The hideous roar he made came with the stench of

death; even worse than before, it unnerved me enough to run. But, I had to take the shot. I had to hope it would work or we might all be doomed. T-Rex started to raise himself and advanced on me. I corrected my aim to adjust for his movement and pulled the trigger.

Nothing happened. “Shit!” I thought. “I forgot to release the safety.” It was only another second, but I had precious few of them ‘til becoming a live snack. This time when I pulled the trigger a flame shot out of the end of the barrel and it felt like a Mack truck ran into my shoulder. As I watched, unable to move, the T-Rex’s head exploded in all directions. The heat from the explosion went out in all directions, including mine and I felt a burning sensation on my forearm.

“Shit! My arm is on fire.” I let go of the rifle and started toward one of the medical centers as two scouts came to help me. I don’t remember anything that happened after that. I woke up on a bed in the medical center, a bandage around my forearm and undressed under a sheet. Loranda was sitting in a chair by my side. She looked half asleep, but noticed my eyes opening.

“Welcome back hero,” she told me.

“I’m no hero,” I said. “What happened anyway? The last I remember was my arm burning.”

“The pain must have made you pass out. You were brought here immediately and they had to cut a chunk of flesh from your arm. You have been sedated for the last two days.”

“Two days?” I asked. “Why so long?”

“By the time they could get to your arm, they had to cut almost to the bone to save it. You had a small speck of white phosphorous burning into your flesh and they had to cut under it to keep it from burning even deeper,” she told me.

“So why the lack of clothes?”

“Randy . . .” she looked bemused. “You don’t really want to know all of that.”

“You mean I . . . ?”

“Yes, you did. You had to be cleaned and so did your clothes.”

“Some hero I make. I end up in a hospital and soil myself because of one native beast.”

“Don’t worry honey, you weren’t the only one,” she told me.

“To soil myself or to end up in the hospital?”

“Only the first of the two. Actually, since you killed T-Rex, we haven’t seen any other signs of native life, except some birdlike creatures that everyone calls Pterodactyls.”

“So, how is the scouting going?” I asked.

“It was slow the first day, but yesterday some of the families were taken to some caves that were found across from us.”

“How about our direction—behind us?”

“The Captain is telling those that do leave that signs of other “native life” have been coming from that direction. I think she has figured out why you want to go there first. And after what you did, she is making sure that you get that chance,” she told me. “Now, if you would be so kind as to get your lazy butt out of that bed and get dressed, we have a

group of people waiting patiently for you to lead them to a spot that only four of us know about.”

“What do you mean four of us?” I asked her. She was still smiling about her last comments.

“Did you go out there without me?”

“No, you worry too much. Jake took Kazak and Dave in the direction you wanted to go albeit through the trees. They found a cave that might be big enough for our group to live in. It’s a wonder, but they refused to tell anyone except me about their find. I was told that it is only about a mile and a half distance along the wake of the ship, then a couple hundred yards from the ship’s path to the cave itself.”

“All right then, I guess we ought to get going.”

“Here, put these on” she told me as she handed me my clothes. “I’ve already closed the curtain and you’ve got no need to be shy around me.”

Boy, when she was right, she was right! I got dressed and was putting on my gear when she handed me the little .38 and its shells.

“Only one nurse and I know about these. The Captain swore her to secrecy, so don’t worry,” she told me then handed me a bottle of pills. “These are for the pain. I was told you should be okay for another six hours or so, and then you will probably need these.”

“I can already tell that my arm isn’t as strong as it once was. How long did they say it would take before I’m back to 100%?”

“If you don’t strain yourself, you could be back to your old self in about three days.”

“Three days? Wow, that quick. What did they do to me?”

“It’s an advanced medical procedure that uses some sort of general filler that is usable with any blood type. I don’t know all the ins and outs of it, but it’s supposed to work.”

“We’ll see soon I guess.” I told her as I picked up my rifle, with my good arm along with the rest of my weapons and gear.

“What happened to that cannon I fired?”

“Jake has it in our room,” I was told. “He has been shown which rounds to use for close quarters use. You used the long range shell.”

“Now I’m told. How convenient.”

“Quit grumbling and let’s go you old fart,” she said as she led the way out.

“As long as I can watch your butt wiggle while we go, you can take me wherever you like.” I told her.

“Dirty old fart then. I can tell you were asleep too long.” But she turned her head and smiled back at me.

Chapter 3

“WELL, WELL.
HELLO, Mr.

Wagner.” The Captain met us at the doorway to the outside world.

“Captain,” I replied.

“I hope you are feeling better. That was quite a scare you gave us.”

“I gave *you* a scare . . . ,” I laughed. “If you remember correctly, I was the one who almost became lunch.”

“Oh, I remember quite well, thank you.” She put her hand on my shoulder. “It was still enough to cause an old lady to nearly have a heart attack. For a minute, I thought we were all going to die.”

“Honestly, I was more worried about myself at that moment.”

“Can’t say as I blame you.” She looked quizzically at me. “I figured you’d be bringing along your group of people by now. Is something wrong?”

“Only the capacity of the near elevator. It’s not capable to bring the pallets we have, so we are using the cargo elevator instead.”

“With so many small families leaving, I forgot about that difference, sorry.”

“Don’t be. I’m expecting the first pallet at any time.” I informed her.

We chatted a little more while waiting for the first pallet to arrive. Then, it was down to the ground we went. Jake came with the first pallet and brought his .50-caliber cal sniper rifle and the 25 mm AT rifle. I had put a high explosive shell in my M-203. I was a little leery of white phosphorous right now.

It took nearly an hour to get all of our equipment and people ready to go. If it hadn’t been for the electric pallet jacks, we’d have never been able to move those pallets. As it was, we had to help push them and we had to conquer several obstacles, but we finally made it to the turn-off point.

I saw trees that had large leaves on them that stretched upward for at least fifty feet, many of them were much taller than that, and green. Man, I hadn’t seen so much green in my life. On the ground was a veritable blanket of green fern-like plants, and all of them seemed to grow about five to six inches from the center stem. While we walked toward the cave, we found a lot of scrap steel, ceramic and body parts that had been picked over, but, we also found some treasures. Sometimes it wasn’t much—a shoe or a hat from an unfortunate victim; other times it would be a scattered case of military rations (also known as Mil-Rats). The

farther we traveled from the ship, the more we encountered. Luckily though, we ran into fewer bodies.

We could see that there were more boxes and assorted items beyond our present location, and I wanted us to gather all we could. But, we were already carrying more than was reasonable, so we left it where it was and concentrated on working our way to the cave.

We had to maneuver around trees with the pallets, but we managed to do so until we came to an incline that was just too steep. Jake pointed out the cave entrance which was about two hundred feet away and we started forming a human chain with those of us that could handle the load. I shouldn't count myself in this, as I still had my injured arm. My job ended up being the cave scout, so I went into the cave and used a flashlight from the ship to check it out. I didn't find any living creatures inside, only bones of several past meals and an obvious favorite corner for relief. The cave wasn't really large enough, but I figured it would have to do for now. I sent the children inside, showing them where not to go and left the flashlight with the oldest, I then found the two electric tent lanterns we had and set them up in the cave, so things could be stored where they belonged. Afterwards, I simply stood watch in case some unfriendly natives happened by.

Our first priority was to get everything in the cave, which took a couple of hours; then it was time for a break and some food. We dined on those few Mil-Rats that we were able to pick up along the way.

After an hour of rest and filling our stomachs, it was time to head back to the ship's path with the pallet jacks to

gather additional supplies. Most of the women and all the children stayed in the cave.

Before I confuse you, we considered everyone of age fourteen to be an adult and many were ill or injured. Injuries were still present on nearly half of us which left more work for those who weren't injured. Only ten of us went back down, and I was only there for guard duty and moral support. We had nearly filled both pallets, when I thought I heard gunfire coming from the direction of the ship.

"Let's go back, people." I told them. "And I mean now!"

They all moved toward the pallets with their last minute items, taking them up the slight incline toward the cave, when I noticed something in a bush that I just couldn't leave behind—one of the two missing 25 mm AT rifles. I ran over and grabbed it from the bush; it seemed in good condition, so I kept it and caught up with the others.

"Jake, drop that fifty on a pallet and get this locked and loaded. I don't know what I heard, but I'd rather be ready for anything." I told him as I readied my own rifle combo.

* * *

"Oh look!" said One Eye sarcastically. "The trap mouth has lost his head. Too bad for him, but good for us. I smell living food here; maybe we could run some down this time."

"Don't be too sure, One Eye. Last time we were here Short Snout got hurt and ended up dying."

"Yeah, but he tasted good didn't he Two Toe?"

“I can’t argue with that, but that rock in him almost broke my tooth. I don’t know how he got a rock in his side. Oh well, let’s go find us some live food.”

Half Tail broke in. “Are you sure we can’t just eat that trap mouth or some of the two leg dead foods that are still here?”

“What’s the sport in that?” asked Two Toe. “Besides, dead food doesn’t make noise when you eat it.” He paused, a grin of sorts in his eyes. “Now come on.”

Out of the trees came seven Raptors just as a family was lowered from the ship. A guard carried an M-16 rifle and the father had a 9 mm automatic pistol, but things had been so calm lately that they were caught off guard. The guard managed to get off three shots which only hit once in the muscular part of a leg and the father was able to get off one hurried shot that did no good at all. The rest was a grisly massacre. Within two minutes, all were dead and half eaten. The Raptors didn’t get to finish their meal though; another guard appeared in the ship’s exit with a .50-caliber sniper rifle and blew half the head off of one of the Raptors, the projectile ricocheting into another’s leg. He put another round into another retreating Raptor before they were out of sight around the back of the ship.

* * *

“I can’t go any farther guys,” One Eye announced. “The rock that hit me really hurts, and I’m losing my good-taste juice (Known as blood to us humans) too fast to heal.”

Two Toe looked at his old friend. “Don’t worry old pal, we won’t eat you until you’re dead. You’ve been my friend too long to eat you alive.”

“Thank you, I didn’t know you felt that way.”

“I still remember you saving me from that trap mouth when I lost my toe,” Two Toe said.

“What about us?” Half Tail asked. “We could eat One Eye alive.”

“I’m the leader here, and I say no!” Two Toe stood his ground. “If you don’t like it you will have to kill me first, and I’m not going down easy.”

“All right,” chimed in No-Flaw, “Have it your way. We’ll just have to wait.”

“Yeah, well, I’m not feeling the best either,” Mentioned Toothgone. “I got a rock in my leg back there, and it really hurts.”

“If you’re going to die too, then maybe we should eat you while we wait on One Eye.” stated No—Flaw.

“Now, there’s no need for that. I’m not even losing my good taste juice very much. I’m sure I will be able to keep hunting with you guys. I just wanted to rest while we wait for One Eye to die.”

“Sounds good to me. Anyone want to say different?” asked Two Toe. No one said any different. “Good then, we let One Eye die in peace; we eat him and move on.”

* * *

We made our way back to the cave without any disturbances, which was more worrisome than if we’d of

had some. Were the native creatures getting smarter? We didn't have a lot of information to work with, so we couldn't come up with any answers.

"Let's get this stuff into the cave," I said just loud enough for the others to hear me. "The first one in—grab an extra magazine for the 25 mm for the return trip."

We hadn't needed the AT rifle, but that was good, considering we had only found it with three rounds of ammo. Not much for a long firefight. We were nearly finished unloading the last pallet when I saw movement down on the path the ship had made. I kept quiet and used hand signals as well as tapping on shoulders to get everyone into the cave. I didn't know what I saw, but it didn't look like humans walking by. If I had had a scope, I may have been better able to see what exactly was down there.

There were only 3 boxes left on the last pallet and after several minutes went by, Dave whispered and asked me if it was okay to go get the other boxes. I used a hand gesture in the negative and pointed to the 25 mm he was manning. Jake had his .50-cal and Bill Sanders had the other 25 mm, add to that my M203, and we had the entrance pretty well secured.

I had Kazak Haquinn get the other M-16/M203 combo and come back to the entrance quietly. It took him a minute, but he was quiet. I handed him my rifle and took his, checking it and found the M-203 was empty. I put in a high explosive anti personnel (HEAP) round. This was the most noise we made in over fifteen minutes – two clicks. Then I checked the rifle and found it on safety with nothing in the chamber, so I chambered a round, which seemed too noisy

and took off the safety. After we exchanged rifles again, I used hand signals to have him go right while I went left to the edge of the cave entrance. We had all been back about fifteen feet from the entrance. At the edge, we stopped and I turned and had the other three come up as well. When I turned my head back, I caught a short glimpse of movement from in front of the entrance and gave the hand signal to stop and drop—not wanting too many of us in the open. I signaled Kazak to back up a few steps and stay near the wall—then did the same myself.

“If you’re friendly, announce yourself,” I said out loud. Nothing. No noise, no movement, but I did see a shadow that just didn’t look right where the movement had come from. I fired a shot, and all hell broke loose. I must have hit something, because there was a noise like a dull screech and then there were five Raptors coming at us from out of the trees. I fired my grenade from the M-203 between two of them and watched one go down—a leg blown off. Kazak used his M-203 and killed another one instantly. The .50-cal hit and dropped one Raptor. Kazak and I continued to pull the triggers of our M-16s but seemed to miss the other Raptors as they made some hideous noises and fled the area.

I didn’t want to take any chances, so I put a round through the eye of each of the three Raptors on the ground. After Kazak and I reloaded, I threw him another grenade and loaded one myself—my arm aching the whole time.

I motioned for Kazak to back up to his original position, and we met the others in only a few seconds.

“What round are you using in that 25?” I asked Dave.

“I hadn’t thought to look, why?” he looked at me, and then pronounced, “Nevermind, I forgot what happened for a minute.”

He checked, and sure enough, it had long range shells in it. He put in the other magazine which had the short range shells in it and chambered a new round.

We decided we would not venture out for a while and kept three guards at the entrance at all times.

* * *

After the Raptor attack, nobody was in a hurry to venture outside the ship. The outside elevator was raised and the people checked for life, but all were dead. The weapons and ammo would get redistributed, but the belongings were stored in a storeroom. The doors were closed for the night.

* * *

“Here they come again,” I said as two Raptors came charging at us as it was starting to get dark. There were only three of us watching at the time, but all three of us fired at these two Raptors like madmen. I fired my whole magazine dry; Dave fired two rounds from the 25 mm, and Kazak had the .50-cal and fired three rounds.

“Did you see that?” I asked as I changed mags while looking for any sign of more Raptors. “They were already wounded and came charging like they didn’t care anymore. Do you think maybe they did that on purpose?” Blood was pouring from the two Raptors, discoloring the normally green ground cover.

“How are we supposed to know?” Kazak asked. “It’s our first time here.”

“I know,” I stated. “I was more or less asking out loud. It wasn’t really directed at you two.”

“It’s going to be hard to sleep tonight.” stated Jake, who had come to the entrance in case he was needed.

“Well, get what sleep you can,” I said. “Tomorrow is another day.”

* * *

“Damn, another pack gone and yet I still live . . . I must find more friends and teach them to work together better,” Two Toe thought to himself.

Chapter 4

AFTER A LONG night of worry, maintaining a constant watch for more danger, it was good to see the sun come up over the range of mountains to our west. Well, as close as we could figure was west anyway, if going by our compass. There were still many of our group that would wake up with the moans and groans syndrome, which seemed to slow down some after getting some food in them.

“Okay, people, let’s see what happens,” I said. “We need those boxes of supplies if at all possible.”

There were only eight of us going today. We had made the decision to leave one 25 mm and one M-203 at the cave entrance. The other three heavy weapons went to the ship’s path. Jake, Kazak and I had scouted around the area in the morning with no signs of danger, so we made the decision to get busy doing what we could.

“Hey Randal!” Jake started. “These pallet jacks have nearly had it. The batteries are too low to make another run of it.”

“What’s that making for pallets, anyway?” I asked.

“10 or 12 pallets at least . . . ,” he informed me, as I was distracted with other thoughts.

“Sure wish that last 25 mm was in useful condition. Hell, too many of these weapons have been ruined.” I looked at the pile we had found scattered about.

“We still added a lot of fire power to what we had.” Kazak interjected. “Not to include all the ammo for those we can use.”

“You’re right; I just hate to see so much loss.”

“What’s lost is lost.” Jake stated. “It’s now a matter of what we can find.” He pointed to the other pallet stacked with boxes. “And how about all this food? I’m not sure we can ever get all of it to the caves, let alone have room to store it.”

“I know and I’ve been thinking on that. I figured that finding that other cave would solve our room problems, but we will still not have enough room for all of this.” I waved my hands to the expanse of boxes, many needing repair or useless altogether. “I wonder how many hundreds, or thousands, there are left out here.”

Jake put a hand on my shoulder. “The full boxes are easy. How about the individual meals?”

“We can get those last, it’s the bulk we want first.”

“Yes.” Kazak agreed. “But it will be much more difficult from now on, as we will have to carry them by hand.”

“We will do what we have to.” Some of the others looked at me with my last statement. I could see their willingness, but also the lack of desire to do the work in a harder manner.

Without the pallet jacks to use for any additional gathering trips, we had to carry a lighter compliment of weaponry or we wouldn't be able to carry enough to make it worth our while. We made do with one .50-cal and our M-16/M-203 combo weapons. We could shoulder these (except the .50-cal) and still carry a case of Mil-Rats.

* * *

"Jake!"

"Yeah Randy?"

"I don't know how much more we can gather." I pointed up.

"I know. I noticed those clouds a few minutes ago while you were gathering that loose ammo."

"We should take what we can to the caves and see how much more we can do before it's too late." I paused. "And we can get some of the others to help with the next trip too."

"You mean the women?" he asked.

"I mean them and some of the older kids too."

So, we carried up what we could, mostly cases of food, leaving some of the lighter items for the next trip, but we had found a case of 40 mm grenades that had only lost part of the lid and a few of the grenades and that took two of us to carry it up the hill.

"I don't mind us going with you and helping, but are you sure we should leave so few of us here?" Loranda was asking me, concern in her voice.

"It's a risk, I know, but there are so many useful items we have found that are easy enough for you and the others to

carry, that we just don't want to leave to the rain. Those of us that can will be carrying more cases of food."

"So you think this is our last chance to grab what we can?" I could tell by her question that she was worried.

"Honestly honey, I'm not sure, but I don't want to find out the hard way, it might cost us."

"Very well then, let's make it fast."

We all made that trip, carrying back all we could and then one more with the whole group.

Since it hadn't yet started raining, our original salvage crew went out and continued to retrieve more cases of food for a few more hours.

"Let's go guys!" I told the others. It had started raining lightly when we neared our salvage sight, so we decided to grab what we could and go back.

"Grab a box and let's get out of here." I told them as I did the same.

"No complaints here." Kazak looked dead tired; actually, we all did.

Jake came closer with a case of Mil-Rats and a day pack. "I found this behind a stump, so I grabbed it."

"What's in it?" I asked.

"How the hell should I know? Hell, Randal, we haven't had time to look at our own family boxes yet. We just don't have time to look at things. See and grab, then take it to the caves. Add in eating and sleeping and that's what our lives have become."

I hadn't heard Jake complain like that before and while I, too, had thought along similar lines, I hadn't realized that it was affecting us all so deeply.

“Do you want me to take it?” I asked.

“No, I’ve already got it in place. Sorry I snapped like that.”

“Don’t be.” I told him. “We’ve had a hell of a time of things.”

“That’s the truth!” He stated as he began walking again.

As we approached the caves, the rain started coming down furiously, our boxes beginning to lose their form.

“You guys get in here!” Loranda scowled in my direction.

“Jake, get over here you damned fool!” His wife, Marci, wasn’t any more pleased with his being soaked to the bone by the time we were done.

“Ah, hell Marci, give it a break. I’m too tired to hear it.”

“Oh, you are, are you? I’ll tell you what! We’ll talk about it while you eat!”

Jake looked at me, then back at her.

“If that’s the case, then I just lost my appetite.”

The look she gave him could curdle milk, but it bounced off of him, of course. He was already falling asleep.

It rained for three days and nights straight. The whole floor of the valley we were in was under a good two to three feet of water by the third day. It still rained though it was starting to ease up some.

During that time we didn’t have near as much work to worry about as we had before. It wasn’t cold at all, although it was humid. The worst things we had to contend with were bathroom calls and lack of space for everyone to be comfortable.

With so little to do, we brought out some of our treasure troves (family boxes and suitcases). Since we didn’t really

know what any day would bring, we went through a box, took what was immediately beneficial and wrote the rest of the contents on the side of the box with a carpenter pencil. We found several sets of dishes, pots and pans and the like, just as we had packed. We also found a lot of bladed weapons of various sizes, but they didn't seem to be worth much against carnivorous dinosaurs. We also found blankets; stationery; a couple of hand mirrors; some candles; a plethora of matches and lighters; female and dental hygiene supplies; deodorants and soaps. There were a fair amount of hand tools, can openers, some jewelry and a lot of photos, but the real treasures were found about halfway through the boxes. A deceased passenger or crew member had packed a bunch of hand tools for real work. There were two each of sledge hammers; picks; axes and mauls; there were a half dozen wedges and cold chisels both; a small hand sledge; two sets of number and letter punches; a pair of crow bars, and a couple wood chisel sets. I would kiss the feet of this impractical person if he/she were here. There was a lot of forethought in the selection and none of the rest of us even came close. This was our lucky day, or was it? The treasure trove of tools was not only a blessing, but also one that would bring blisters, calluses and a lot of hard work.

Instead of going through the remaining boxes, I set up a work schedule for those of us who could do what was required. I took the first shift with Jake, now having full use of my arm. We started cutting into the back corner of the cave—the only surface without supplies piled high. Every few minutes, we would stop to catch our breath and the older kids (ages 10-13) would pick up the bits and pieces we had cut

away. As a design, I had set up an outline of where I wanted this material so it would be put to good use and out of the way at the same time. The outline I laid out would ultimately connect the two caves with a wall covering both of them.

At the pace we set, it looked like the wall might get finished in only a few hundred years, give or take ten, but we had to start somewhere. We had been working for 25 minutes when Kazak came up and asked us to stop.

“What’s the matter?” I asked. His reply shocked me.

“You two are going about this all wrong,” he informed us. “I noticed how little was being moved, so I decided to watch. First, the way you are using those picks is going to do more damage to you than that rock. And second, you are chipping away at it like little birds. Let me see one of those; watch what I do, and listen to why.”

We watched him work for a few minutes when, suddenly, a chunk of rock bigger than all the pieces we cut together came away from the wall.

“How the hell . . . ?” I asked.

“Show me how you did that!” Jake stated with exasperation in his voice.

“It’s really quite simple,” he told us. “You need to cut into the rock at the same spot until you have a small hole like this.” He pointed to where he started. “Then you make another hole nearby like this.” He pointed again. “After that, you just cut along the top edge and swing in proper form like I showed you. This will cause fractures in the rock that will spread, which in return will cause those larger pieces to break off. The way you guys were going, we’d only have rock chips and no sizeable stones.”

I couldn't argue; he was right. This was not something I knew about, and I was glad we had him along. The work was still hard and slow, but we could now see that progress was being made. He was also right about the picks; it wasn't as devastating on our hands his way which enabled us to do more work. The only complaints now were from the younger helpers. They were having trouble trying to carry the larger pieces as they were heavier. By the time we were all finished, our hands calling it quits for us, we had a small alcove worth of work done.

I looked at the progress made and thought." Let's see, all of us work for a total of seven hours; it will take four or five days to heal, and we don't even have room for one stack of boxes. This doesn't bode well."

"Kazak." I called out. "I do like the difference in the amount of work that was accomplished with your knowledge to help us, but what can we do to prevent our hands taking such a beating?"

"Other than using some gloves, I haven't got any ideas." He looked at the blistered palms of his hands. "But I will tell you this. If you can find a way to get some gloves, try to get some leather gloves for the tool-side, and some cotton gloves to fit inside of them, also known as the hand-side. This will keep the friction to the skin to a minimum, and will increase the amount of work done, without hand damage, by twenty times."

"Where did you learn that?" I asked.

I used to work a small mine in the mountains of Colorado, during the summer months." He informed me.

I kick myself each time I think about our beginnings. Had we just opened that underlying crate first, we would

have found four pair each of leather, grip, garden and dishwashing gloves. It would be four days of painful hands before we would find them.

As bad as we thought things were because of the rain storm, it was also soothing to listen to it. Hearing the pattering as drops hit the ground seemed to remind some of us that things change, and you just have to learn to adjust.

After the rain stopped, Jake took Dave and Bill to look around where we had picked up the boxes of food. They came back with a few meals each in their spare hands and wore a strange look.

“Okay,” I said. “Who’s going to tell me what’s going on?”

Jake opened his mouth like he was going to say something, then he shut it. It was Bill who finally spoke up.

“They’re huge!” he told me. “I thought T-Rex was big, but these others make T-Rex look like a child.”

“Well, what are they?”

“Hell, I don’t know, I always called them longnecks, but I never imagined they were that big.”

“Ah, Brontosaurus is it? Well, at least these won’t want to eat us. I guess that’s a plus. “How about the food?” I asked.

“It’s all over the place, but we’ll need to take empty boxes with us if we’re going to carry very much,” Dave chimed in.

“All right then, we already have one empty box. Let’s empty out another seven and we’ll go fill them up.” This was a chance to gain more of a food supply. It was hard to pass up.

Ten of us went out to gather the food, but as we arrived we could see that many of the pouches were floating in the

water and the rest of us now saw these longnecks standing around eating their fill of vegetation.

It literally took us a minute or two before we could pry our attention away from them and get to salvaging the Mil-Rats and put them in their boxes. We spent most of the day going back and forth, but it was much slower to fish them out of the water and put them in boxes and carry half soaked boxes back, especially while watching these huge beasts. We ended up using dry boxes each trip and made five trips successfully that day. It was the sixth trip that ruined our desire to return.

We had fished out enough pouches to fill only about one third of our capacity, when suddenly, the Brontosauruses started to charge in our direction. For some reason or other, they didn't seem to care where we were—which meant that we had to run out of their way to stay alive. This was our first worry, and then we heard an all too familiar roar coming from the direction from which our long necked friends had come. Another T-Rex—and we didn't have a 25 mm with us; so we ran like death was trying to catch us, which in a way, it was.

None of us wanted to look back, nor did we try to bring any of the food. We just hit the trees in the most direct path we could to get to safety. We had only been running for a couple of minutes when footsteps behind us let us know that we wouldn't be able to outrun this T-Rex. So, I called to Dave to join me behind some rocks off to the right. He joined me there, and we prepared to do what we could. I picked Dave because the two of us had the grenade launchers, which we now kept loaded with a HEAP round.

We only had a few seconds; so I told him to fire the M-203 and reload while I fired mine. We would rotate as long as we could or needed.

As I finished giving directions, Dave launched his grenade having seen the T-Rex through the trees. His first shot was a little short, but it still gave Rex something to think about. My first shot was also a little too short and didn't phase him any that I could tell. I started reloading. Dave's next shot was almost dead on. Rex went crazy biting at himself, bumping against trees and generally not acting as expected. We realized this was our chance to gain some distance, and we took it at a sprint. We had covered about 150 feet this time, nearly half the remaining distance to the cave when we heard the footsteps again. This time, there were no rocks to hide behind. We crossed a small meadow and turned around to see not one but two T-Rex—and they looked pretty mad at us. I fired my HEAP round between the two of them and wasn't far from being on target; this caught their attention for a second. Then, they started coming again.

“Get behind a tree!” Dave yelled and fired his grenade at only 20 or 30 yards. It blew up after hitting Rex on the left side and again the pair of T-Rex went crazy, crashing into each other and one of them running into a tree.

“Run for it!” Dave yelled, and we did, too. If it were possible, I'd have thought we outran the speed of light, but I knew that was an exaggeration.

As we approached the cave, Jake and Kazak were coming out with both 25 mm rifles. We just kept picking them up and putting them down 'till we were in the cave. It took

us a minute to realize that we hadn't heard any shots fired from the 25 mms, and I started thinking that maybe our friends had been eaten or worse. I loaded another grenade after realizing I hadn't done so while running for my life. While I was reloading, Dave took notice and started to do the same.

"Let's go outside and see what's happening." I told Dave. We had only made it a few yards when we noticed Jake and Kazak sprinting back toward us, eyes as big as silver dollars.

"Get inside, quick!" Jake yelled while running full speed, nearly tripping on a rock that poked through the ground in the middle of the entrance.

We made it in and not a moment too soon. I had everyone move back as far as possible, and the four of us with the heavy weapons stayed in the front of our party.

As a T-Rex burst through the surrounding trees and headed for the cave, it was only luck that his head was the only part of him that could fit through the entrance hole. It was at this time that our shock wore off and three of us fired at once. We must have really hurt this guy as he turned tail and ran back into the trees—roaring as he left.

We now realize that the short range rounds for a 25 mm AT rifles just didn't work properly at short range to kill a T-Rex; so we made the decision to use the long range shells instead.

It then occurred to me that Dave had been more successful with the T-Rex than I had been, so I asked him about this. He informed me that he had been using the white

phosphorous (WP) grenades instead of the HEAP rounds I was using. This made sense, and I made a note of it for future reference.

After the T-Rex attack, Jake came up to me. “What can we do to make it safer around here for ourselves?”

“I know,” interjected Kazak, “Let’s cut down the trees a hundred yards in each direction.”

It seems that here are always things you can rely upon; one is hard work, anytime you feel like you’re catching up, something happens to set you back. Another thing is trouble, it will always find you when you least want it.

“That’s a very good idea,” I told him. “And we can use the wood to make a palisade like the forts the cavalry used in the 1800s. You build a wall, and then add a walkway to where the tops of the logs are shoulder height. You use the palisade to shoot behind, giving us some protection from most forms of danger, including the back blast from the WP that comes out of those LR rounds.”

Well, that settled it. We first decided to work on a secure area, which included the field of fire, and build the wall with the gate, and then we would gather any food we missed.

We waited until the next morning for the last food run, as we had no idea if the T-Rex would still be around. As we heard no sign of them, we went out fairly early. We took a 25 mm with us, loaded with the Long Range (LR) ammo this time, but found nothing worth worrying about. We filled up the boxes and brought them back. Two were worse for wear, as they had been stepped on—ruining some of the pouches. So we salvaged what we could, taking the rest of the day to go through some of the boxes and suitcases.

The following days were fairly calm for us. We saw some Pterodactyls flying around and a herd of Triceratops traveled along the ship's path on the third day, but that was all we saw while we chopped down trees and cut the trunks to length. Some of the others dug a trench for the logs and set them up. It was a slow process, but not as slow as the excavating of the cave; this fell to the younger "adults" of our group.

On the fifth day, we had visitors come to our site. The Captain had sent two families to us that wanted to know if they could join our group. With them was an armed guard of ten men who had brought a pallet of supplies. They asked about their pallet jacks, and I informed them that they were all empty of their charges and that one battery had been destroyed by a T-Rex during the attack. They promised to bring back a fresh supply of batteries.

That's when we were informed that seven families had been slaughtered with only one surviving child who had hid himself in a crack in the rocks. He was being cared for and had already been invited to live with another family. We thanked the guards for coming. Once they were gone we introduced ourselves to our two new families.

The larger of the two families were the Adams family. There were Jim and Carla with their two girls, Stacy and Tracy and one boy, Dale. The other family was the McGuire's, and they were most definitely Irish. There were Daniel and Melinda with their two sons David and Ronald.

For the first time we had two people with the same first name. We decided that David Sinclair would be called Dave and David McGuire would be called David.

After introductions, we made a chain and moved the supplies into the far cave since there was no room in the main one. Later that day, the guards arrived with three pallet jacks loaded with supplies, and they shared the news from the ship.

“More tools?” I asked, surprise in my voice.

“Yes, and more,” the guard who seemed to be in charge told me.

It turned out that another 26 of those critically injured had recovered to intensive care, but another 103 passengers had died. The inside of the ship was starting to empty out now. This was due to the deaths of the injured that didn’t survive and those that had left on their own. The crew was now using several of the storerooms to start planting gardens.

The Captain was trying to find a way to produce a larger electrical supply, and the genetics scientists on board were working on embryos of piglets.

Before the guards left, they mentioned their project to increase visibility outside. They were also following our palisade design for protection, but on a larger scale.

“Good, and thank you very much. Please thank the Captain for me,” I told him.

“Don’t worry, I will. She seems to think you guys will do much more than most of the groups here. Good luck,” he turned, and the guards left.

As much as we wanted to work clearing trees and the palisade, it was more important to get the supplies into the other cave. It was a little easier this time, having brought the pallets a good sixty feet closer to the cave entrance along the side. Unfortunately, we still couldn’t get them up higher on

the hill. That first pallet had mostly been the supplies from the new families, but did have some medical supplies, blankets, several odds and ends and a bag of mixed potatoes. Many of the youngest of our group wanted to eat the potatoes, until it was explained to them that we could use these to grow many more and have a semi-consistent supply.

These next two pallets were more like someone actually planned for the survival of mankind. There were at least two of each hand tool we could imagine, including several saws of many descriptions, hand drills with ten of each size drill bit/screw bit, boxes of different size nails, screws, nuts, bolts and all kinds of small hardware. The real gems were twelve solid tires/wheels that we could use for some sort of transportation of heavy goods. There were a few boxes of gloves, bundles of bedding and several cans of various seed crops.

After placing most of our supplies into the second cave, we all put on gloves (except those already wearing some) and went back to work on our perimeter. We had a lot of projects to do, and even with the Adams and the McGuires, it was taking a long time to get any noticeable work accomplished.

We kept at it each day though. It was only after a week of doing so that it was starting to look like we were getting somewhere.

It hadn't been an uneventful week. We had seen a couple of herds of herbivores come through the valley and had seen a pack of Raptors hard on the tails of the second. All of us were thankful they didn't come in our direction or cause us any trouble. During that one incident we only had to shut

things down for a few hours and double the guards for the rest of that day. This seemed a minor infraction in relation to what we had experienced so far.

Surprisingly, it was a group of humans who disrupted us next—a group of guards no less. The same guard that had been in charge last time was in charge of this group. They brought a request for goods instead of a gift. They had even brought a pallet jack with them to bring back whatever it was they assumed we would give them.

“Hello Randal,” the guard in charge said. “You may as well know my name, since it seems we’ll be seeing each other on occasion. I’m Edward Silverman, Captain of the guard. Captain Hanley has asked me to come down here to ask for your assistance.”

“Okay,” I answered. “What can I do for you?”

“I’ve been sent to ask if you may have found any food or weapons and for ammo you could spare,” he told me.

“Sure, I can spare a few things, but you’ll need more than one pallet jack to move it. If your men will help, you can use our pallet jack as well as your own. Please, just bring it back after recharging the battery. Say, tomorrow or so?”

“That’s better than we expected. I guess the Captain was right about you.”

“Well, let’s quit gabbing and get to it.” I turned to Dave and had him open the gates instead of going around the part of the palisade that wasn’t yet complete.

“If you’ll set your men up here,” I told Edward. “I’ll have my people do the rest.”

"I really appreciate this," he replied. "We had another Raptor attack a few days ago. How did you fare?"

"We saw some dinosaurs go by, but we didn't get attacked by anything." I answered him without lying, but also not giving away any knowledge of the Raptors. "How many people did you lose this time?" I asked as the re-used boxes of food were being moved to the pallet jacks.

"Only eleven of us this time, but we also had another twenty six die in the ship's hospital. A couple of families are also missing."

"That's not good," I told him. "Any clues as to where those families went?"

"No, none at all, unless you count an occasional footprint here and there; the likes of such I've never seen before," he answered in return. "And those few are only in areas between rock outcroppings."

"You must be much braver than I am, going out looking for others all the time? We just stay here and build our perimeter."

"That's not how I hear it, or see it for that matter," he told me as he looked at the progress around him. "It seems you have a scar on your right forearm, and this food looks like it has been gathered in the forest out there. Am I correct in that assumption?"

"Okay, you've got me there, but that was out of necessity, for survival." I told him.

"Which is the same thing I am doing—me and my men, that is," he replied. "By the way, do you want anymore lost souls up here?"

“I could probably handle a few more, as long as the Captain thinks they will fit in, that is. Why? How many are we talking about?” I asked.

“There is a family of six, the Fredricks, and a family of five, the Jacobs. The Jacobs have three boys ages 11 to 15, and the Fredricks have two boys and two girls, all of them under the age of twelve. Captain Hanley has already talked with them and seems to think that your camp is the best place for them. From what I’ve seen here, I agree with her.”

“I don’t accept laziness here. As long as they know we all pull our own weight around here. We have nearly everyone doing something except the really young children. They should also know that 14 years old brings adult responsibility here and age 12 brings guard duty.”

“I’ll tell them, and I think I may tell Captain Hanley that she might consider a similar idea, though maybe 16 might be more her style.”

“May as well start somewhere,” I told him, as I noticed that the pallets were full. “Now, how many weapons will you need?”

“Do you have enough to spare an extra rifle for each of us to carry back?” he asked.

“There’s about twenty of you?” I mumbled, “Just a minute if you will . . .”

I went over to Kazak and asked what we had the most of and was informed that M-16s were in abundance. I asked him to grab thirty of them and three cases of ammo. I grabbed an M-16 with a 12-gauge and an M-16/M-203 combo and walked back to Mr. Silverman.

“I must apologize for the lack of heavy stuff, but we only gained a couple of usable heavy weapons,” I told him. “We found two 25 mm, but the barrel is bent on one. We figured to use it for spare parts, if nothing else.”

“You’re kidding, right?” he asked, surprised. “We have two spare barrels for those due to their importance. We’ll give you one spare barrel for your rifle if you would give us the rifle with the bad barrel,” he pleaded.

“All right,” I told him. “You have a deal.” I went back and grabbed the useless 25 mm and took it to him with a bag of shells and one extra magazine. “Sorry, it’s not much, but we only found bits and pieces of the scattered armory.”

“Are you kidding? Once again, this is more than we expected!” he exclaimed. “Is there anything you need that we haven’t brought yet?”

“Actually, we could use some rope and wire if you have any and some cushions from the ship seats. They would sure make things more comfortable to sleep on. Oh, and bring in those two families, please.”

“We haven’t yet checked all the storerooms, but I’m sure we can bring those cushions. I’ll see what I can do.” I was told.

“By the way . . .” I asked. “Why don’t those short range 25 mm shells do much damage?”

“They were designed to penetrate thick armor and then explode. The hide on these dinosaurs must not be hard enough to set off the detonator, try aiming for the head; maybe the skull bone will activate it.” This seemed like

a logical explanation, but aiming for the head brought problems of its own, still, it was worth a try.

The weapons and ammo were loaded up, and the guards left.

“Why did you give them more than they asked for?” Dave was curious.

“It’s give and take,” I informed him in return. “We give them more then they expect, because it will help keep more of them alive longer, meaning they have a better chance of defeating more of the monsters around here. That in turn leaves less to attack us—making us safer than before.”

“Oh, I hadn’t thought of it that way. Maybe that’s why we seem to listen to you.”

“Well, I appreciate the compliment, but I’m no smarter than anyone else. We all have our own areas where we are best.”

“You mean like Jake being in charge of the potatoes?” he asked.

“That’s exactly what I mean,” I told him. “I wouldn’t know where to start with planting those things, and we need the best working on them so we can continue to eat.”

“I thought we had plenty of food.”

“We do, for a while at least . . . but what about when it starts running low? Shall we turn into savages ourselves and kill each other off just for a few to live a little longer? This is all we have, all the people we get to start humanity here on this planet, with the world I see around us and its vicious predators; we still might not make it.”

“What makes you say that?” Dave looked concerned.

“Think about this . . .,” I told him. “We started this journey with over 10,000 souls. We’ve been here less than

one month Earth time and have lost just over 3,000 already. We didn't start with the food supplies or weaponry we were supposed to start with. The ship and its two shuttle craft are destroyed. We are not at the chosen landing sight, and a few thousand of the survivors are still injured for some time to come. We are undermanned and under gunned on a hostile world, and it will get worse as we run out of ammo to protect ourselves." It was a long speech, but one Dave and the others who had listened in, needed to hear.

"So, it's hopeless then?" Dave questioned.

"I never said it was hopeless. I'm just saying that if we are to survive, we need to learn how to do so with what we can create from the land around us. We all need to help in any way we can." I didn't know it yet, but I would be making a similar speech a few more times in the future.

Chapter 5

OUT ON THE rocks, seven creatures lie basking in the sun. Their spiked scales are camouflaged for the rocky terrain.

Scattered about them are bones of several humans, some with meat still on them. These Slugasauruses are full and content from their latest hunt. This new food source is easy to grab and tastes good too. Who could ask for more than this? Sure, this new source of food has bones, but they have no scales, horns or sense of movement capable to notice the Slugasauruses approach. It is hopeful that this new food source is plentiful, as these eight-legged creatures will surely flourish with such easy prey.

* * *

The ship's troop of guards showed up at our camp again, after only a couple of days.

“Mr. Silverman, so nice to see you again. How are things going? I asked.

“Things have been better,” he told me. “We lost another family last night. Again, no sign of what happened. I’m afraid we will no longer be able to let families go out on their own—only in large groups.”

“Perhaps that is best anyway.” I told him. “We’ve had a fair amount of success with doing just that.”

“I’m afraid it’s not so simple. Some people are seemingly too stubborn for that idea.”

“Then let them try it on their own, but don’t supply them with more than what they brought with them and enough food for two days; at least that’s what I would do.”

“I’ll take your idea to Captain Hanley and she can make her decision.” he looked over his shoulder.

“These families are the Fredricks and the Jacobs, along with Brandon and Melody Sidwell.” I could see that these two were in their mid-teens. “They lost their mom last night in the infirmary. Their father and sister were killed in the crash. We brought all the families’ belongings with them and more cushions than I think you can use. The Captain asked if you can spare any more food for the ship. I told her I would ask you.”

“I think I can spare another two pallets worth. Will that help enough?” I asked.

“We’ll take what you can spare. We need to get by until we can feed everyone with what we grow.”

“How about killing some of the herbivores and using the meat to help supplement your diet? We just agreed last night

that we will implement this as soon as another herd comes through. Try not to kill more than one of the herbivores for food, and attempt to use weapons that don't need ammo if possible."

"That's yet another good idea for me to present to the Captain when we get back. Do those ideas ever stop?"

"This wasn't my idea at all," I informed him. "It was an idea from my son, Michael; he's only eight and came up with an easy way to prevent our food supplies from depleting. After we grow our own fruits and vegetables we will be nearly self-sufficient food-wise.

"I like it, though I don't know about the weapons idea," he told me.

"Whatever you do, remember not to use WP rounds or you will ruin much of the meat, if not all of it. Also remember that ammo isn't reusable," I replied.

While two pallets of food were brought out to the pallet jacks and the other supplies were sent into the caves, Mr. Silverman and I talked about storing water. Our group gathered water each morning from the leaves of one type of tree that would usually have close to a half cup of clear, clean water in it. The branches alone provided more than enough water for us each day; so we slowly built a reserve in pots and pans which we covered with lids and plates. After telling him about the trees, he asked about our dogs and cats. I informed him that we usually kept the dogs tied up in the cave. We would sometimes take one or two with us for their better senses—to warn us of trouble. The cats were mostly just pets, but occasionally they would hiss at trouble.

It took a good half hour to accomplish the tasks at hand, and I felt bad that I wasn't helping to move things. The day before, I had been told that our group would rather I keep Mr. Silverman busy than leave him to go where he pleased and look at what we had. We still had a larger armory than the ship and more than seventeen pallets of food packages—plus the dog and cat food.

Right before the guards left, Mr. Silverman told me that they had a storeroom full of wood stoves in the ship, if I wanted any of them. There were plenty, so I told him we would take four for cooking and six for heat sources. He wrote it down, and they left.

* * *

Two days later, a herd of Brontosauruses, maybe the same herd as before, came through the valley from the direction of the ship. We almost didn't have time to get in place to hunt them, but luckily caught the end of the herd. With this kind of a dinosaur, it was better to kill it by shooting its head, but the use of two short range rounds from the 25 mm was a high price to pay.

Something had already spooked them and we figured it was either the ship's crew or a pack of predators, so we maintained our positions with the long range ammo loaded into both 25 mm guns. All of us watched for signs of Raptors or T-Rex.

It was an hour so later when Mr. Silverman and a group of guards showed up. We waited for them to get close enough for talking. I then started a conversation with him.

“Did you bag yourself a good one?” I asked.

“We got one, but ours was much smaller than yours. We weren’t really ready for them so soon.”

“That’s a shame.” I told him.

“How so?”

“You should be trying for the older ones. Let the young continue to grow and multiply, keeping a constant food source.” I explained to him.

“Yet another good idea from you. I’d tell you to stop that, but it’s beneficial that you don’t.”

“How small was the one you killed?”

“It was much smaller than this one, why?”

“I’m not sure we can use all of this one, and you have thousands to feed. We only have fifty mouths to feed. I’ll tell you what, I’ll send a runner to go get our pallet jack, some help, and we’ll get started now.”

He looked at the Brontosaurus, “Where do we start on this thing?”

I showed him. “We’ll take this front leg meat and some of this underbelly flab and maybe part of the neck,” I told him, “The fat can be used for cooking oil and candles. We will want the leg bones and ribs for making weapons and utensils.”

“Anything else you can think of?” he asked me.

“Well, horse hooves are used for glue, so I might take one back foot and one front foot to see if they work for glue. If we don’t ruin the hide, it can be tanned and used for tents, drapes or even clothing. Maybe strips would work for a sort of leather used for shoe laces, twine for tying weapons

together, etc. The uses may be endless or we may find out that it just doesn't work for what we need. It's a new world and we have to adjust to it or die trying."

"All right then, I'll let you have first crack at it."

I took a sharp, hooked, skinning knife and started at the head. Silverman watched as I cut around the head and then made as straight a line down the length of the neck as I could. By the time I had finished, I was coated in congealing blood and had to take a break. Cutting the hide wasn't exactly accurate. The others would soon find out for themselves that this was more like sawing. It took nearly the rest of the day just to cut pieces of the hide in approximate eight foot squares and to hack off enough meat for the evening food.

We tried boiling, frying, and baking under coals, and still the meat was stringy, and it tasted horrid. It wasn't like beef or chicken or anything any of us had tasted before. We figured that if cooked properly and with some spices added, it would do. For now, most of our group gladly ate the Mil-Rats. Tonight's preparation was a failure. Our best cook, Carla Adams, tried the meat each way we cooked it, then announced that she could do something with it tomorrow but needed the meat no later than noon.

Early the next morning Carla took some of the girls and two armed guards with her a few yards away into the trees. Her idea was to start pulling weeds she had discovered that had a bulb under the ground. After they had gathered all they could carry, they went back to the cave, and she started cleaning and cutting.

We sent off a good forty pound hunk of leg muscle to her by about 10 a.m. (if it were Earth time), and she cut it

up into workable pieces, like stew cubes, and added it to the pots she had on the fires.

We again worked all day salvaging meat and carrying hides to the camp. In order to save effort, we would load large chunks of meat onto a piece of hide and drag it to camp. We had lost a lot of meat overnight due to spoilage and decided that we would have to figure a way not to waste so much next time.

It was getting to midday (days here lasted close to 31 hours and nights about 11 hours) when Edward Silverman and his group showed up to start working again.

“Nice to see you could make it Eddie.” I opened the conversation.

“Sorry, we would have been here earlier but we had our hands full with helping the others with the other Brontosaurus near the ship. They hadn’t even started on it, so we showed them how to cut and save the skin as well as what to look for when cutting the meat. They were going to take the spoiled meat into the ship; I showed them the difference.”

“All right, then, I guess I can’t complain about that too much. Having two crews do this will be better in the long run.” Eddie Silverman seemed to be a very competent leader in his own right.

“Mr. Wagner?” he asked.

“Yes?” I smiled, having a pretty good idea what might be on his mind.

“How did you guys eat that meat last night? It tasted like shit and was stringy as hell. We had more people throwing it up than keeping it down!”

“Well, honestly, none of us kept more than a few bites down ourselves, and I agree with your description of the

meat. But, I do have Carla trying to work on it today to see what she can make of it. Just put what you get into a cold room, and I'll let you know what happens."

Then the talk stopped and the work continued. The rest of the day was hot, smelly, hard work, and it seemed to be a waste of time, but we had to learn to adapt.

When we could no longer work, we gathered up what was ready and dragged ass back to camp, leaving the guards with the carcass to do what they could.

It was late that evening when we sat down and had a meal of meat and, well, something like a mixture of potato, garlic and onion. Since Carla found these bulbs, we let her name them. She decided to call them "flavoids"; so that's what they became.

The meat was tender enough to fall apart in the mouth and the flavoids made the taste eatable, if not quite good. It was a definite improvement and filled our bellies.

The next morning we discovered that some of the extra meat we had hauled up had spoiled; so we had to take it outside and get rid of it. Carla spent the day showing others how to cook the meat, how to pick flavoids, and making "dino-jerky", as she would call it.

Our food gathering crew went out after a breakfast of Mil-Rats, and we were halfway down the path when we noticed a T-Rex eating from the carcass we had left.

I had to make a decision quickly. I chose to try and kill the T-Rex, even though it might ruin the carcass it was munching on.

Jake and Dave both had a 25 mm, so I used hand signals to tell them to use LR ammo and aim for the head. They

both found comfortable areas on the ground with a good field of fire. The T-Rex started to rise from its position and then turned his head toward us, somehow knowing we were there. Jake fired his rifle, and the shell opened the T-Rex head like an overripe tomato. Dave didn't have to bother to shoot, so he started to get up when he heard another Rex roaring off to the left. Jake was still ready, swiveled to aim left, and fired as the Rex came into view. This T-Rex was hit above his right hind leg and went to the ground roaring in rage and pain. He only lasted a few minutes and then went still.

Dave was back on the ground, uncertain if there were any more T-Rex nearby and not wanting to find out the hard way. After nearly an hour, we slowly went down the trail in two teams, one 25 mm always on watch, but it seemed that there must only have been the two of them. We searched in all directions as far as possible and seeing nothing, we checked to be sure the first T-Rex was dead. There wasn't much left of its neck, and the remainder of its head was scattered in small pieces all over the place.

We moved on to our second T-Rex. We stood around looking at it, wondering if this one was also dead, when it opened its eye. The monster tried to get at us, roaring as it struggled. Kazak pulled out his .50-cal and took careful aim. He gave the T-Rex a head-shot. It died several minutes later with one eye still open—seemingly looking into our souls.

Just to be sure, I asked for a .22-caliber rifle so I could shoot it in the eye, not wanting to waste higher powered ammo, but we had none with us. I didn't like it, but put a shot from my M-16 into its eye just to be sure. I was relieved when it didn't move this time. Both T-Rex were dead.

Relieved, I sent a few of the work crew back to camp with one of the 25 mms, and the rest of us headed toward the ship to see if we were needed there.

Getting there was slower than usual; we didn't want to run into more than we could handle or show up and be surprised. When we did arrive, we found a work crew cutting up the Brontosaurus by the ship, and others out cutting trees and processing them for use in a palisade. It seemed to be a normal day around here. I overheard someone by the ship calling for Captain Hanley. As we walked over to the elevator, Captain Hanley arrived at the entrance, stepped onto the elevator with a couple of guards and came down to the ground.

"Well, hello Mr. Wagner," she started. "I certainly didn't expect to see you. This is your first visit since leaving, isn't it?"

"Yes, Mrs. Hanley, it is." I replied informally—to distinguish our own group. I wanted to make sure that she could see us as our own entity now and not just an extension of her own, unless you count our telling you about the food.

"I see," she said, obviously uncomfortable with my lack of formality or what she could do about it. "Mr. Silverman has shared with me some of your great ideas. I'm not quite sure how I can repay you. As you can see, we are using a lot of those ideas already, though I'm not sure about the meat. He did mention something last night about testing a new idea with it. How did that turn out?"

"Not bad really," I informed her. "If you could spare some of your cooking staff for a day, we can show them what to do."

“Well, it’s not like I’m going to have much of a choice now, is it?”

“You always have choices; it’s a matter of what you do. Would you have people eat it—or refuse it?” I asked her.

“All right, I’ll have ten of my cooks go with you today. When can I expect them back?”

“Sometime tomorrow night is my guess, though I’m not sure of an exact time.”

“Very well,” her reply meant it was final. “Now, to what do we owe your presence?”

“To tell you the truth,” I mentioned, “We were checking to make sure that you were okay.” I told her about the attack this morning.

“That’s not good,” she looked at the dead Brontosaurus by the ship. “I didn’t even think of the consequences of having that animal here. I’m sure that predators can smell that thing from miles away. I’ll have to come up with a better idea for food procurement.”

“I’ve already been thinking about it, but I have yet to come up with an answer.” I looked around for a moment. “While we’re here, I was wondering about the wood stoves I was told I would receive.”

“Oh yes. My apologies. We’ve been so busy lately that it slipped my mind. I’ll have them ready in an hour or less. If you have the time to wait for them, I could bend your ear a little, if you don’t mind.”

I told her that was fine, and let the others know to take a break, but be on the lookout for unfriendly guests.

* * *

The next few hours were uneventful—bringing the stoves and cooks to our camp. I hadn't thought about the cooks seeing our supplies until it was too late, but they didn't say much about them.

With much of our resources being used to work on the food supply problem, the palisade and tree clearing were going much slower. Carla and Casi started working with the ship's cooks, and let them taste the results from the night before. Next, was teaching them how to make dino meat taste decent. The cooks were hesitant, but delighted, at the improvement that was made.

"I can't believe it's the same meat!" was the general consensus among them, and they were all ready to learn Carla's secret.

Carla also experimented with different ideas for making dino-jerky, but ran into some roadblocks there. She attempted four different recipes and none of them smelled promising.

We spent the rest of our day trying to get some more area cleared and more palisade raised. That night, we had plenty to eat and the hopes of something new to be added soon too. The cooks were learning well, one happened to mention that there was a large amount of salt and pepper in the ship and that we could get some of this soon. We had some spice plants already started in a garden, but it would still be a while before we could use any of them, salt and pepper would be a real boon.

The following morning the cooks were shown what the flavoid plants looked like and the best way to use them. They were also asked to make a pot of this stew-like concoction

themselves, though supervised, to make sure they made it correctly.

Unfortunately, due to spoiling, we also lost a lot more of the meat we had. This would be another problem to solve in short order.

We escorted the ship's' cooks back with a sample of their work, when we noticed that the three dinosaurs had been nearly stripped to the bone. This more than put us on high alert, but we could find nothing but some tracks around the skeletal remains left behind. Those prints led in the direction of the ship, so we followed them all the way there.

We were met by anxious faces, filled with puzzlement, and we saw the skeletal remains near the ship as well. We were met by Captain Hanley who looked frustrated and excited at the same time.

"I don't know what happened!" she exclaimed excitedly. "We went in last night, and this morning . . .," she waved her hands toward the remains, "It's all gone. I mean, just like you see it."

"If it makes you feel any better, it happened to those by our camp too." At that, I could see the confusion in her eyes. "And there was a lot more to eat by our camp than here."

"Amazing. How can this be?"

"I'm not sure amazing matches how I feel, but it's definitely mysterious. On another note, how about you try some of this concoction and tell me what you think."

"I hope you realize that I must be careful who I trust to cook for me," she told me.

"All right, I'll eat some first." I took a bite. "Does that make you feel better?" I asked as I looked at her.

“Okay, sorry. I feel a little foolish having said that to you,” she tried a bite of meat. “Not bad. I can’t say it’s my favorite, but it’s definitely eatable. What are these chunks of white floating in there?”

Since I didn’t want her to worry about them, I grabbed a piece, ate it and announced “Carla, our cook, found them, she named them flavoids. They’re pretty good. They are sort of a cross between a potato, an onion and garlic.”

She tried a piece and said, “I like those better than the meat. How many do you have?”

I walked around where the trees had been cut down. “They are all around you right now,” I told her as I pointed them out on the ground, some starting to get dry tops. “You should pull these first, clearing them from around the tree stumps which should leave you some areas for more garden space. It seems they grow best in shady areas. But, once you get done clearing the area, only take every third plant from under the trees and you should have them year-round.”

“I can’t believe it, right here under our very noses. You are always full of information, Mr. Wagner.”

“That’s because I have most everyone working on what they are best at, and we don’t stay in a ship all day.” The words came out a little sharper than I intended. I explained to her what I really meant, and it seemed to smooth things over. I left the ship with the guards that I came with, getting back home just before dark.

Home, is that what a couple of caves had become? It kept me thinking for several hours that night. Yes, this had become our new home. This over extended cave with seat cushions for beds and rock walls had become the only place

we could call our home. Had I done the right thing, bringing my family here, away from all that Earth had to offer, into a killing zone of dinosaurs and who knew what else? I don't know. I told myself, but back on Earth, we would all be dead by now. I fell asleep with that thought going through my mind.

* * *

The huge, six-legged, wobbly monsters had eaten so well, that they would not need to feed again for a good long time. They could smell decay from a good ways away and it was what they liked best. How nice it had been to find so much food in one area. How unusual. No complaints here. This just meant that for a time the four of them would be happily full. There was also the scent of something else around here, an awful smell that made them not want to stay too long, but that was fine. They could eat and move very quickly and quietly. They decided to keep this valley on their route next time as well. The only thing that they didn't like was that nasty burning feeling from some of the meat, but it would pass.

Chapter 6

IT TOOK ANOTHER week of hard work, but the palisade was finished with three gates, one near each cave, and a third, though smaller gateway, was erected that would separate the compound into two sections.

The meat had run out and no other herds had come by lately. Life went on.

None of the attempts at jerky had turned out to be anything edible, but that was no surprise as Carla had told everyone that it didn't look as if any would. Feeling as if she had failed, Carla was down on herself.

I was working at the small wall, when I was called to the main gate by my wife, Loranda. As I arrived, I noticed that Mr. Silverman had arrived with his usual group of guards and a young girl, who I found out, was named Jessica Bailey. She was 11 years old. They had brought a pallet of supplies with them that included Jessica's family possessions.

“Hello Edward,” I shook his hand. “What brings you up here on a nice cheery day like this?”

His face took on a grim look. “Not so cheery, I’m afraid. We lost two more families last night, except for Jessica here. We brought their things. Jessica is gong to need some help in dealing with her loss and she’s pregnant too.”

The idea of this nearly floored me. This young girl hadn’t even started showing signs of puberty yet and she was pregnant. This would be especially hard for her. “We also brought you some rope, barbed wire and razor wire. We have a few more things for you, but this is all for this trip.”

“You sound like there are some problems you aren’t talking about. Would you like to take a walk?”

“No, but I will sit on a stump with you, if you’re really interested.” I nodded my head and we found a couple of stumps where no one could hear well before he started in. “I’m afraid that we have lost an outpost similar to yours, though not fortified or with the weapons you have, but it is still a loss that has people talking.”

“How many lost?” I asked.

“Forty one. All in a cave similar to yours. Not a shot fired. It’s eerie and has a lot of people spooked.”

“I don’t blame them. You have me spooked just listening to you. Is there anything we can do to help?”

“Yeah, there is. Stay alive, and don’t let whatever did this do the same to you. Get the wire up as soon as possible and concentrate your work on the defense of this place. The people need hope and I think you can give it to them.”

“I’ll certainly do my best.” I told him. Then he got up and walked over to his men.

“We’ll just take an empty if it’s all right with you,” he said, pointing to an unused pallet jack. I nodded, watching them leave.

Elizabeth took Jessica by the hand and showed her around. I gathered most of the men and told them that we needed to get the razor wire up along the palisade before night fall. All else ceased except unloading the supplies into the compound, and the young adults worked on enlarging the cave.

This job wasn’t as easy as we had hoped. We had previously only built two ladders for working on the wall. This made it to where I had to get others to start building more of them. We did end up getting the wire to run across the top of the palisade before nightfall, and there were three more crude ladders completed.

That night, we doubled up the guards. This left us with less sleep. Those of us who weren’t on watch slept with our guns close at hand. It was harder to fall asleep tonight due to the circumstances. It felt like I had only just closed my eyes, when Jake woke me up for my watch. For the first time in nearly a month (Earth time), I also wore the mini Uzis. I wanted to supplement my normal M-16/M203 and assortment of blades just in case.

We were sure that something would happen this night, yet nothing did, leaving us all abnormally tired in the morning. We all took turns sleeping throughout the day. We also worked on the small interior wall, but our routine had been disturbed.

Because of our lack of sleep, we were grumpier than usual and hurt some feelings when we didn't intend to, but we somehow all managed to get through the day. If it hadn't been for the women, I don't think it would have worked.

During the next night, we again kept the double watch and again nothing happened. Lack of sleep led to another day of less accomplishment and more aggravation. The real clincher was missing a herd of some sort of large birdlike creature, about the size of an ostrich, as it went by. This would have been an ideal shot at a food source, maybe even capturing some and breeding them. But, we just weren't at our best, and we lost the chance.

Because of this, I decided to go back to our regular watch system. Besides, we had finished the small wall during the day and could now watch an area half the size, since no one stayed in the other side of the compound.

It was near what we called the mid-night hour when I woke up with a bad feeling in my head. Something was wrong, my senses told me, and I couldn't hear anything. It was quiet, too quiet. I grabbed my rifle and woke up Loranda.

"What is it?" she asked. I put my finger to my lips and pointed to the others, wanting her to wake them just in case. I slowly walked toward the cave entrance and could barely see, due to the fires we kept going, the outlines of something unfamiliar on the wall. I could tell it wasn't human, so I pulled the trigger and received a splatter for my efforts. That was all it took to start a frenzy of activity. As I watched, the thing started to move again so I shot it again and again, using eight rounds on it before it fell to the floor.

With everyone awake and the youngest ones crying, more wood was put on the fires. Other men were coming to my aid with their weapons ready. The large amount of light was making it easier to see the cave walls. I was now able to spot another of these large monsters trying to escape. Dave grabbed a .50-cal and shot it through the back of the neck before it could make its escape.

The women picked up torches that had been made and lit them in the fires. The flames from the torches brought even more light to the area. I was moving forward when Kazak started shooting his M-16 at the ceiling above me. I jumped back just in time to have the wounded creature fall from the ceiling and land in front of me, still not quite dead so I shot it in the head twice, it quivered, then stopped moving.

We looked high and low throughout the cave but didn't find any more of these monsters. Then we went outside and found the guards running to the cave from their stations.

"What happened in there?" Bill asked as he slowed to a stop.

"We had some unfriendly beasts try to come say hello," I told the guards. "Let's check the compound."

Someone put more wood on the fire outside the cave and we started looking around in pairs. One person carried two torches for light and the second person had a rifle ready in case one of the creatures was located. After only a minute, Kazak fired again and another monster fell from high above the cave entrance.

"What the hell is that thing?" asked Bill. "I've never seen anything like it before."

“Well . . . ,” I said, “Neither have I, but I’ll tell you what, those are sure some sneaky—assed bastards, and they don’t die real easy either.”

“I did fairly well with this .50-cal,” Kazak replied. “Two shots, two kills.”

“Yeah, but not everyone has one of those sniper rifles. It took eight rounds from an M-16 to kill one and that’s too much ammo,” I told everyone who was listening. “What I’m concerned with is that they can cling to a ceiling and not make a sound.”

After the failed attack, the night went by slowly, but most of us were too tense to go back to sleep. We now knew that we weren’t as safe as we thought, and we needed to stop this from happening again.

The next morning, the ladies went to work on these “Slugasaurouses”, as they became known, to try and find out if they were good to eat. I also had them detach the plates with horns. I was thinking we could make some sort of armor from these.

Today would be a good day to build a sturdy, yet open door for the cave entrance. We didn’t need any more slug monsters coming in and grabbing us in our sleep.

The actual door only took about three hours to craft, but the hinges, mountings and locking mechanism took half the day. Drilling through the rock with a hand drill wasn’t very easy and took the majority of the time.

I wanted to make a trip to the ship and explain to Hanley what had happened. This would have to wait another day, as everyone was unusually tired after the long night and I just couldn’t spare the resources for the trip.

We had meat for dinner; in fact, it was very good meat. It had been tried several ways and the only one that wasn't delicious was boiled. It was so close to eating ham that we really thought that the cooks had traded meat on us. Fried up in strips, it was better than bacon, and it had more meat and less fat. Fried up thickly, it was like ham steak. Baked, it was a little harder to wait for, as it took so long to thoroughly cook, but it was worth it. Once again, dino jerky didn't work. The meat would get gamey instead of drying.

That night everyone slept much better. Now that they knew what was out there and that it couldn't get into the cave, those not on watch slept soundly.

* * *

The next morning brought overcast skies that we figured would mean rain, so I gathered up some of the men and women to go to the ship and left the rest to work the wood that was already cut and laying on the ground. The children gathered all the small pieces of wood they could to keep it from getting soaked from the rain.

When we arrived at the ship, we were surprised to see several birdlike creatures in a fenced in area.

The Captain and I talked for an hour or so. I told her about the attack and how to prevent it from succeeding. We talked about a group of families that was getting restless to get out of the ship. I asked her for a couple of days to get ready but informed her that they could use the other cave and the other side of the compound. We talked about the pig embryos maturing, though still weeks from being "born". I

also asked about the birdlike creatures that were pinned up and was informed that they have a taste like turkey—sort of. She told me about the latest casualties and that she would send supplies as soon as the ground dried again. With this, she mentioned how Silverman and his crew had retrieved well over 100 pallets of Mil-Rats from farther down the crash path and that there was still much more to collect. I then noticed how dark the clouds had become and had to excuse myself from her company to gather the others and get headed back to our camp.

We were about to our end of the ship's path when it started raining. By the time we made it back to camp, we were completely soaked and it was prematurely dark due to the intense cloud cover. I figured we would have to wait this storm out and then we could get back to working on the walkway part of our palisade. It was darker than usual as we approached the gate, and I attributed this to the lack of a campfire.

As per our security measures, I called out in advance, and the gates were opened to let us in. We all changed into dry clothes and hung our wet ones high over the fires to dry and settled in for a good night's sleep.

* * *

When I woke up next, it was still raining and still quite dark. I asked Loranda what was wrong with a question in my eyes.

“By what I’ve been told,” she said. “It has been daylight for over an hour, it’s time for you to get up and start your day.”

“If the sun’s been up for an hour, I should be working by now,” I looked outside again. “How can you tell when the sun comes up if it doesn’t get any lighter?”

“Jake said that you can tell because you can see a few feet farther. Actually, I’ve been outside and you can see the trees around the clearing quite well. It’s just not bright and sunny.”

“Okay honey, I’m up. Was there any excitement last night?”

“None that I’ve heard of. Now go get busy old man!”

“All right, all right! Put down the whip you ornery old woman. You’d think I didn’t pull my weight around here or something,” I grumbled in a playful manner.

I grabbed a bite to eat and gathered my normal crew around me. “Okay folks, as you know, or have probably heard by now, it looks like we will have some new neighbors tomorrow evening. So, let’s get our supplies moved into our own cave. The others are already removing the cushions from the floor. We will likely be very crowded, but we need those supplies over here. We’ll help others, but I won’t let someone else become greedy with those supplies,” I looked around the work crew. “We’ll meet at the other cave in five minutes. Do whatever needs doing.”

I walked directly to the other cave, leaving the small gate propped open; most of the others went with me. Two of the men met us at the cave at the specified time, and we all started carrying the heavy supplies first. When we had only the lighter boxes left, things moved much faster. We stacked the boxes of food as close to the ceiling as possible to afford us more room. We still had the work area for enlarging our

cave, which included a medium sized path through the middle of our available space.

I was organizing the work parties for different jobs, when one of the guards gave out a cry and landed in the mud.

“Let’s go!” I exclaimed as I ran out to see what happened, rifle at the ready. But, it was only a fall and he was okay.

“What happened to you Ted?” I asked.

“Look at the platform,” he pointed, “The damned thing just tipped back, and down I went.”

I could see the problem now. The ground was giving way under the weight of the palisade and Ted standing on the platform. What seemed to be packed Earth had turned into unstable mud and we now had a more important job to work on than those I had begun lining up.

“Change of orders people,” I looked at the crew. All told, we only had fourteen men, ages 14 and older. With two on watch, that only left twelve of us for the hard work. “Jake, you take Bill Jr. and Sidwell; cut and process medium width logs from the closer trees. Bill you get the woman folk, except Carla and Casi, and you will all be moving stone from the cave. Scott and Ted are on watch. Clifford and Ronald, you bring in the processed logs for the palisade. I want them lined up parallel to the palisade first—about three feet away. Then place two perpendicular logs with each parallel log. Jim, Daniel, David, Kazak—Dave and I will all cut stone, and I want Dale to bring water around. Bill, let Jessica, Latisha and Elizabeth watch the young ones; now, let’s go people. Oh, Bill, the first of the rock goes on both sides of the guard platforms, we need to stabilize those first.” I put

on a pair of gloves and walked to the inner cave area, where the enlarging was being done.

Because I hadn't previously checked it out, I looked around the cave addition for what had been done the day before, and noticed that we stood in a room that was only about 20 feet by 25 feet. This space wasn't going to be enough room for more than four of us, so I corrected my assessment. "David and Daniel, you two go and help with the trees. I won't have anyone getting hurt if I can help it. Daniel, you take a 203 with you and watch for enemies, that's your first priority. Take care." It took them a few seconds to exit and then we started swinging tools at the wall.

We kept at it, constantly swinging, chipping, and moving falling rock out of the way, and still we couldn't work fast enough to keep the ladies busy. I had Bill and three of the toughest women go and help the others, having two of these ladies taking over guard duty, freeing up Daniel as well. The trees were now coming down and stripped fast enough to keep Clifford and Ronald busy pulling logs with ropes. In fact, they were slowly falling behind in their work. After six hours, we needed and called a break for lunch and rest. Those working on the trees all helped carry and drag those logs that were building up on the two young men, during their trip in.

Everyone took a one hour break, and then it was back to work. We dragged a little at first, but worked our way back into a rhythm. The first guard platform was now more secure, the rock was forced as deep as possible in the mud. The ladies were working on the second platform already

and it would be finished in the next hour or two. Until then, the second guard would occasionally help with the repairs.

We had been working on the cave for about two and a half hours, when Kazak's pick went through the rock. He was so surprised that he nearly lost his grip on the handle.

"Hey Randal," he called. "Get over here and check this out. I've hit some kind of hole."

"Everyone out, now," I told them, walking out with them. I went to the nearest fire and grabbed a lit medium sized branch, then went back into the room ever so slowly, holding the firebrand as far out as I could. Even after I got to the pick and hole, there was still nothing unusual. I had Kazak pull his pick out. When nothing happened, I figured that it must not be flammable gas, which helped, but that didn't mean it was breathable air.

"Okay Kazak, let's get back out." Which we did again, but only long enough to warn the others to stay out and to wrap damp clothes around our mouths and noses. Then we went back in, with me telling the others to listen for us and concentrated on that area, breaking into a large cavern. We opened up a hole about seven feet tall and five feet wide. The cave floor was about one and one-half feet lower than the floor of the cavern we just found, but we could make a ramp later. We all grabbed weapons; and three of us took torches as well. while looking around, Kazak took a 25 mm armed with Short Range (SR) ammo and used the infrared scope before we entered with our torches—ruining any infrared spectrum at that point.

We entered cautiously, not knowing what to expect. Whatever we did expect, it wasn't what we found. As we

started walking down the stairs we . . . wait a minute, stairs? “What the hell was I thinking?” I thought to myself.

“Hold on guys,” I said aloud, “Did we just walk down some stairs or am I going crazy?” I asked.

“You aren’t crazy. I just wasn’t thinking about it yet, but you’re right.” Kazak told me with a hint of surprise in his voice.

“Kazak,” I called, “Leave that 25 mm here and go get the others. All but the youngsters, those watching them, the guards and one volunteer to get us if the guards need us. Everyone else comes in armed and with a light source. Bring the electrics with you.”

“You’ve got it,” he told me and disappeared.

Chapter 7

N EARLY THE WHOLE
camp was now waiting

to enter the cavern. While waiting on the others for security reasons, we hadn't gone any farther into this area. We didn't know what was in here or how big it was. We did know that our torches didn't show any walls, or for that matter, anything beyond a few dozen feet. But, we could see that we were on a stairway that had been carefully cut out of stone. "Live stone" was what I called it since it was cut without detachment from its mountain.

With the arrival of the group, came our two electric lanterns and the one good flash light. I asked for the flashlight and then had Jake and Bill to bring the lanterns and follow me. We went down the steps very carefully, even though we could now see a little more and a little better too.

After only about twenty feet, the steps ended at a floor that seemed to open in nearly all directions. The large

expanse of this cavern was still beyond the light we had; so I told Jake and Bill to stay put and walked back to the others.

“Okay folks, this is what I need you to do.” I looked at them. “I need half of you to come with me. I am going to have you place your torches where I deem them most efficient. Then I want you to go back with three others who will be in the front, middle and the rear of the group. All of you come back with two torches each. Carla, you stay at the entrance, Loranda five steps down from Carla, Donna five steps down from Loranda and Elizabeth, I want you on the last step. Let’s go.”

I used the flashlight to find areas to place the torches, standing up and when they were all placed we could see a little more. Then it was the wait until the larger half of our group came back with more torches.

It seemed like a long wait, but it was only about five minutes until they returned. I walked them in another circuit out from the first, noticing that we were finding more stairways up into other unknown places and that the vastness of this place must be mind boggling at the least.

By the third trip, we were nearly out of torches, but we could finally make out that other human-like beings had once lived here. We had run across some deteriorating skeletal remains that looked suspiciously like a human’s except the lack of one leg. On the third rung out, left of the opening, we could hear a noise that sounded like running water, but this would have to wait until we could see more. With this, I decided that we needed a much better light source if we were going to see what this place once was.

Except those few torches needed for leaving, we snuffed all of them from the outer ring, the middle ring, and finally the inner ring, in that order, for easier use later.

“I want one of the hides blocking this entrance of light and two guards here at all times. We don’t know what’s in there and I don’t want any surprises.” I told the others. “Now, I want Bill, Dave and David to come with me. Dave, you grab a 25 mm, Bill, a .50-cal. and David, grab an M16/12 gauge. The rest of you start making more torches. We’ll be back as soon as possible; we’re going to the ship,” I announced.

* * *

We arrived at the ship without any difficulties and could still see the guard over the palisade wall at the entrance.

“We need to talk to Captain Hanley!” I bellowed. “May we come in? This is very important.”

“Just a minute,” the guard replied and brought the elevator down for us.

As we were riding back up, the guard asked us, “What’s going on that brings you out in this weather?”

“We don’t know yet,” I told him. “But we need some equipment so we can find out.”

“It doesn’t make sense to me, but okay,” he waved us in.

The air in the ship was a little musty, but I didn’t say anything out loud. The guard inside the entrance told us where the Captain should be and we went straight there. She was in the officers’ mess hall talking with Mr. Dunbar

and Mr. Silverman; so I tapped on the door. They all swung their heads toward it, and Captain Hanley waved us in.

“Hello, gentlemen,” the Captain greeted us. “What brings you here at this time?”

“I thought you would have heard by now,” I told her, and she looked puzzled. “Don’t you still have your com units?”

“We usually don’t need them much anymore and especially at this hour,” she informed me. “Now, what’s on your mind?”

“We need a large light source,” I told her. “Actually, we need several large light sources and a way to keep them working for an indefinite time frame.”

“I’m not sure I understand what it is you’re asking for. Maybe if you tell me what you need it for I can better understand how to help you.”

“Okay,” I told her. “But you won’t believe me when I tell you.” Then I described all that we had done and found that pertained to the cavern and what my idea was.

“Well, Mr. Wagner,” Dunbar cut in, “What do you have right now?”

“I have two lanterns, one flashlight, and a few dozen torches. What are you thinking to add?”

“How about a bunch of lighting fixtures, wiring and a few large batteries?” He looked at me as if waiting for me to jump.

“That would be great, but what happens when the batteries are drained? And how would we get them into the cavern?”

“I’ll have four of our electricians help with the setup and we have plenty of manpower around us. I’ll get my people

started on it right away. We'll be headed your way tomorrow morning, barring any unforeseen attacks."

"Okay then, we'll be waiting. By the way, we could use some extra guards. Do you think those families would like to travel tonight?"

"Would they?" asked Captain Hanley. "You should have heard the grumbling when I told them it would be a couple more days. They were so excited to get a chance to leave, I thought I would have to contain them by force," she looked at Silverman. "Go. Let them know that they will be leaving as soon as they can get their things together, please."

"Yes Ma'am," Silverman responded, leaving quickly.

"Now Randal, how much lighting do you think you'll need?" Dunbar asked.

"As much as you can set up, by the looks of it. We must have lit up over 10,000 square feet and didn't find a wall.

"Okay then, I'll work on it. Captain?" he gave a look as if asking something. When she nodded, he too left.

"Well Randal, it seems that you are causing an uproar in my ship. I hope it's worth it."

"I'm sorry for any inconvenience I've brought to you, Ma'am."

"I'm not really worried about it. I just think it's a little funny that's all," she told me. "Now, run along and find those families. I'm sure they're on the ground already waiting," she started laughing.

I bid her farewell, and we left to the entrance.

It took several trips to get everyone to the ground; most were only able to bring their suitcases, but they were ready to go. The Teasdale and Takahashi families were able to

bring their family cases, but the rest would have to wait. There were another 52 people in all—mostly families—but four of them had recently lost theirs.

I led the way to our outpost, and I had the others spread out among the group of new arrivals. It took us a little longer to get back since the group was carrying their personal gear with them, but we still made good time. It was getting almost too dark to see when we finally arrived at the gate and went into the compound.

After all the work to move our supplies together, we ended up crowded together for awhile with this new set of families.

While we were gone, the rest of our camp had been busy making torches and some had obviously went out and collected arms full of branches to make more.

Most everyone was soaked from the rain and there wasn't much room. We ended up sleeping against each other in our clothes and we were covered by one blanket per person. We didn't have any extras, or we would have passed them around.

* * *

A bright and sunny morning greeted us, giving hope to a beautiful day and in fact, looking back, it was just that. After only two hours, a line of people showed up carrying light fixtures, coils of electrical wire and of all things, twenty people showed up riding bicycles. I couldn't believe it, but they were there. Then, at the end of the line came a forklift; something I hadn't even fathomed.

“I thought we didn’t have any vehicles,” I mentioned to Silverman, who was driving the forklift. The pallet was full of batteries and electrical components.

“We didn’t,” he replied. “But, the electricians were able to steal parts from one to fix the other and . . . wala! We now have a forklift.”

“Well, I’m glad we have it. Say, where did the bikes come from?”

“They were in a storeroom from the lower levels that we had written off due to the amount of damage sustained. Our people had patched the holes in the bottom of the ship, well, the larger ones anyway, and were taking off these light fixtures and wire, when they ran across a whole storeroom of fun items. They think they can piece together another ten or twenty bikes when they have time.”

“Good, we can use some fun and transportation,” I told him. “That lift, unfortunately, won’t fit into the cave. How about using that lift to bring one of those pallet jacks in here. I know it will run out of electricity, but we can use the manual controls when it does.”

“Actually, we will be setting up a recharge station, if things go right, so I’ll bring in two of them.” He set down the pallet behind the palisade. I noticed that the pallet he brought was covered in clear plastic, and I was happy that someone thought ahead, considering the weather we had just had.

After all the fixtures were set down, the ship’s people left and we started to move things into the new room for easier storage.

A couple of hours later, as we were doing our best to level the pathway to the new room and make as many more

torches as possible (made easier with additional help), when the ship's group came back with more light fixtures rolls of wire and another pallet on the forklift. This time it had family boxes, heavy rolls of wire, more electrical equipment and some partial bikes. After leaving once again, having left four electricians, we decided to move things closer. We literally ran out of room. The only empty space we had was a narrowing path to the cavern hole and we were trying to get that flat enough for the pallet jacks to go over.

The ship's work group made two more trips with light fixtures and boxes of fluorescent tubes and I was informed that this was it for now. This was fine with me since we almost ran out of room behind the palisade, what with gardens, pallets, fixtures, boxes and people making torches.

After a couple more hours, we were finally able to use the pallet jacks as far as the opening to the cavern. So, we got everyone ready, had the pallet jacks in the pallets and required most of those capable get armed and carry two torches a piece.

Kazak took down the piece of hide, and we went in to the cavern. I, once again, had most of the people follow me, and I had them light the torches that we had left behind the day before. Then, I had most of them place new torches where the torches would cover the most area. The new members were as amazed as the rest of us were yesterday and the electricians had big grins on their faces. We now had enough light for people to start bringing light fixtures in and start setting them between the torch areas.

We completely cleared out the new room into the cavern and then brought in the two pallets of batteries and

equipment to the far side of the room. Some torches were set into cracks in the rugged walls of the new room and all three electric lights were used in here to illuminate the room. It took the electricians about two hours to set up the batteries, partial bikes and some equipment I didn't understand. Then they started laying out wire between light fixtures placed upside-down on the ground and attaching them to each other. The fixtures were wired in sets of ten each, with 10-15 feet between them

During this time, torches had to be replaced occasionally, and guards were watchful. After four hours of this, one electrician, named James, said they needed a break and some food. That sounded fine, but I was getting anxious for them to get some lights turned on.

Oh well, I guess everyone needs a break sometime. I had some Mil-Rats brought to them and waited impatiently for them to eat, while trying not to show it.

When they were finally finished with their break, James looked at me. "I'll need five volunteers to ride those bikes and they will need to do so unless I say to stop."

"Fair enough," I told him and found five people I knew I could trust. When they were all seated and ready to pedal, James placed a cable onto each of the two posts. You could see the area light up with ten times the light, maybe fifty times, I don't know. What I did know is that I could see walls for the first time. The expanded lighting revealed stairways that zigged and zagged all over the place, many to cave entrances that held who knows what else; others continued into darkness. It was fascinating; someone had

to have spent decades building all of this, and now we had found it. Something else caught my eyes—more important than any stairway. It was a river. It had to be forty feet across, and I couldn't tell, but it appeared to have a bridge in the distance.

“Okay James,” I looked at him, his gaze drawn to the river as mine had been, “Now, what do we do?”

“I don't know about you, but we're going to wire some more lights, and we're going to mount them on the walls. I'm going to make sure that we go in that direction first, too,” he told me, pointing toward the possible water bridge.

“Yes, I know, a regular water supply will be much nicer than gathering water from trees every morning,” I told him, thinking I had the same idea that he did.

“That's not why I'm looking at that river.” He looked at it in wonderment. “That river will turn our micro-hydro plants, and we will have all the electricity we want.”

I hadn't thought of that and I didn't want to admit it; so I kept quiet about it. I did think of other ideas such as running water for waste product removal, but for now I started others working on mounts where he pointed and it began to look like we were getting somewhere.

* * *

We no longer needed a hundred torches on the ground; so I had them snuffed and saved for another time.

Each hour, I had others trade jobs; so no one was stuck on bikes too long. Just like the standing watch, rotation was best for all the others involved. The good thing about the

bikes was the older kids could ride with their parents as a family. We did have some six person families, but I was assured that another bike could easily be set up.

The first mounted light fixtures were installed in the power room, a.k.a. "the new room", and then off towards the river they went. The lights in the "new room" were connected to the same wiring, but the other fixtures were left for the eventual hydro-electricity. Sometimes we needed to move the fixtures of one strand or another to get light where it was needed, and most of that happened towards the river.

James and his companions didn't want to stop; so he wrote a letter to be sent to the ship, and I took three others and delivered the letter to Silverman. The guard understood immediately and went farther into the ship with some help. He came back with a pallet of equipment, two electricians and approximately 100 more light fixtures for us to take to the cavern.

"How many more fixtures are in here?" I asked him.

"Around five thousand throughout the ship. Why?" Silverman asked.

"Just curious," I replied. "I wonder how many we will end up using."

"I guess that depends on how many people you end up with. I tell you what. I'm curious myself as to what all the fuss is about. How about I go with you guys and have a look for myself, if you don't mind?"

"Not a problem. I could show you around where I'm able, but not any farther than seems safe."

We were lucky enough to have a safe trip back. I took him and the others into the cavern. Those carrying fixtures

brought them all the way into the cavern before setting them down. All the work force from the ship stood and stared in awe. There were still a lot of unknown features that couldn't be seen. Silverman announced that he would do what he could to make sure we would eventually have enough lighting for such a huge area. There were areas that looked to have once been fields; others that may have contained some sort of animals and many more that I had no clue about. Eddie Silverman stopped looking around and became full of excitement.

"What do you think this place used to be?" he asked me.

"My best guess is a town or city of some sort. If you look down there to the right," I pointed, "You can see the skeletal remains of what looks like a human. All the steps we've seen are about the right height for us too."

"How many people do you think could live in here?"

"I really don't have a clue Eddie. We don't have enough light yet to explore any farther in a safe manner. In fact, I'm not sure we're safe right now, but don't know what else to do."

"This is a major find and it will be hard to keep those on the ship from wanting to come here to live," he informed me, the look of worry easily noticeable on his face.

"Edward, look . . . until we can say it's safe in here, I don't think we should risk anymore lives. If you really want to speed things up though, I guess you could send any single male volunteers that don't mind working hard. We could probably use the help. But, I don't want to risk any families in here, okay?"

"That sounds fair enough to me. I'll present it to Captain Hanley and see what she thinks." A strange look now replaced the previous one of worry.

“It’s not up for debate. We either do this my way or no way at all” Edward looked at me with questions in his eyes, but refrained from asking them. I then led him and the work party back outside.

James talked to the two electricians who had just arrived, showing them what he wanted, and then he and the other three went and got some food and sleep.

The first thing the two electricians did was to install another set of five bicycles, like those already in use, and hook them up to the system. Then, they went into the cavern and wired sets of light fixtures together with plugs on each end. They were finished with eight sets, when James and his crew got back from their well deserved rest. For a few hours we had six electricians working together, and laying out their future work. Then, it was time for the other two to get some rest.

By this time, it was light again, and those of us that had been able to sleep now found ourselves starting another day’s work. Even with all the new members in our camp, we were spread fairly thin for work units. Some were kept up to help the electricians. Food had to be available during the night, and we had to keep the bicycles going as well as the guards.

It was a great relief when Edward came back with nearly eighty men, all of them carrying light fixtures and wire.

“All of these guys are single?” I asked in disbelief.

“No, if I’d of only brought single men, then there would only be six of these guys here,” Eddie told me. “These guys were adamant about helping with this project. Most everyone on the ship is willing to move here right now, but I’ve got them waiting for some word to do so.”

“Good, I don’t have the resources here to baby-sit thousands of anxious people. Now, there’s plenty of work to do; so let’s get these lights inside. Then I’ll set up work crews.”

While Eddie was there with his forklift, I had him lift the pallet from the day before up onto the floor of the cavern so we didn’t have to lift the heavy micro-hydro plants by hand. When that was done, I set about putting these volunteers to work. I put some out to work on cutting down trees, building palisades and breaking rock at the other cave. The remainder rotated between peddling the bikes for electrical current and helping the electricians. My people were glad to get a chance to stand down for a while.

* * *

I kept an eye on things and caught up on what was going on in the cavern. The electricians and workers had about thirty fixtures mounted along one wall, though they weren’t on yet. Several sets of lights had been plugged into the left strand and were almost to what actually was a bridge. The hydro-plants had been carried to the area near the bridge. Two more sets of lights were being carried toward the bridge as I arrived, leaving three more completed sets still unused and two more sets being made.

I went over to the electricians by the bridge and found James.

“So, how are things going?” I asked him.

“Not too bad. I just wish there were more of us to work on this project.”

“Aren’t there more of your guys on the ship?” I asked.

“Yes, there are three still on the ship, but two are stripping the lower levels of these fixtures and making sure they work, leaving only one electrician to maintain the ship. If this wasn’t so important, we wouldn’t be here at all.”

“Oh.” I didn’t know what else to say. “Well, I’m glad to have you here,” I said, feeling foolish for blurting out something before I thought about it. I watched as the other two sets of lights were placed where James wanted them and they were plugged in. This lit up a little of the far wall on that side—off in the distance. I could again see more staircases leading up into darkness and tried to judge just how high this might go; remembering the towering height of the mountain range our cave delved into. There was the possibility of 1500-2000 feet easily – mind boggling at least. With the immense amount of possibilities, I knew what needed to be done and excused myself and went back to our cave.

“I’ll only be gone an hour or two and I’ll have Jake, Dave and David with me as usual,” I told my wife, Loranda, as I grabbed my weapons and web gear.

“I understand that, you old goat,” she snapped back. “But why do you need to go to the ship at all? We have the electricians and extra laborers. What is it that can’t wait until tomorrow?”

“You’ll see when I get back. For now, please just trust that I need to go. Okay?”

“You need to find another way to contact the ship from here; so I don’t have to worry about you going out there as often. Can’t you use a phone or something?”

“Tell you what sweetheart, I’ll ask while I’m there.” I gave her a kiss and left the cave.

The four of us kept to the trees until we arrived at the area cleared by the ship’s work crews. We could see that they had a gate for their palisade now. After looking and listening, I hailed the guards at the gate. One of the guards waved us in, but I couldn’t understand all that his gesture entailed. We were two-thirds of the way to the gate, when we heard a noise behind us and the guards yelling for us to run. They didn’t have to tell us twice. We bee-lined it for the gate as fast as we could, noticing only one of the doors was open. We barely made it inside when the door was slammed into by a Raptor. There were eight men holding the door closed and two more sliding a large log in place to keep it from coming open by the repeated charges of the Raptors out there.

“How the hell did you get past the Raptors?” a guard asked us.

“Hell, I didn’t even know they were there,” I replied, “It must have been dumb luck,” I said over the sounds of gunfire. “How long have they been out there?”

“About three hours now. They showed up and killed two workers and a guard before we were able to scare them off and get everyone inside.”

“Damn, that’s not good,” I said, concerned.

“It would have been a lot worse if we hadn’t finished this wall this morning. We must have a higher power watching over us,” the guard hesitated. “What brings you here anyway, if you don’t mind my asking?”

“I need to talk to Captain Hanley about a couple matters that have come up. Could you let her know I’m here, please?”

He used his com unit for a minute then said, “Go on up. She’s expecting you in the officer’s mess.

* * *

“Ah, Randal,” Captain Hanley shook my hand when we arrived. “And to what do I owe this surprise visit?” She waved to a chair.

“Well,” I took a seat, “It seems to me that there are a lot of people still on this ship.”

“Yes?”

“And you don’t have enough electricians to go around now do you?”

“No, I don’t, but I don’t see what . . . you clever young buck you. Are you suggesting that I ask the people if they have any electricians among them?”

“Exactly what I was thinking. I mean, it doesn’t take an electrical genius to dismantle or wire in a light fixture does it?”

“No, it doesn’t,” she answered.

“And wouldn’t that free up your electricians to do the more delicate work, while speeding things up on both sides?”

“Yes, it would if there are any aboard, that is. How about we find out right now?” Then she picked up the ship’s intercom unit and announced that she needed any qualified electricians to report to level six for a possible job venture.

After she made the announcement, I asked her about some sort of communication equipment so we could talk to each other without having to risk our lives.

“I’ll find out before we’re done here,” she told me, and then it was time to find out what we had to work with.

“Only four?” Captain Hanley asked. “You’d think in the times we were living in that there’d be more than four electricians in this crowd.” She looked at Dunbar, who was informing her of the news.

“Well Ma’am,” he replied, “That’s all the certified electricians we have on board. We also have one guy that was not yet finished with his certification, and we have seven handymen that say they did their own wiring. That makes twelve who could do the work, but I didn’t know if you wanted them.”

“Right now, they’ll have to do. Get four of the handymen and one certified electrician to help here in the ship. I want the others to go with Mr. Wagner here and help in the cavern. Got it?”

“Yes Ma’am.”

“Now, what do we have that we could use to communicate with Mr. Wagner here and any other groups of fifty or more?”

“Well,” he paused. “We do have four shortwave units that can send and receive, but he’ll need to wire it to a power source. He blushed, “Sorry, I wasn’t thinking.”

“Very well, make sure he gets one today. Now if you would, please, send in the workers who will be helping the electricians.”

It took just over five minutes for them all to file into the officers mess. The captain told them what was needed.

“Okay, guys and lady,” she started, noting the one woman in the group, “I need your help both here and in the cavern. It might be safer in the ship, but I only need one certified electrician and four others to help on board. I need the rest of you to work in the cavern we don’t yet know much about. Do I have any volunteers?”

Dale, one of the handymen, asked, “What’s in it for us if we help in the cavern?”

“That sounds like a fair question.” I jumped in. “The best I can offer is next in line to choose your family’s place of residency, if we find any housing. We don’t yet know what we have to work with, but it seems that a man-like civilization was at one time established in this cavern.”

“Yeah, then where did it go?” Dale asked again.

“We have no idea. It is a mystery to us all. But, I can tell you that as of the time we left we have not been attacked from any beings inside the cavern.”

“What about our families?”

“Bring them with you. We will happily accept you and your families into our outpost.” I explained. “Though I won’t yet let the families into the cavern, not until we know it’s safe.”

“Well then,” again Dale spoke, “Count me and mine in. We can be ready within the hour.” And with that, we had nearly everyone volunteer and had to make three volunteers stay behind. We tried to make it fair, so we kept our offer open to them as well as those who were leaving.

“I thank you, Mrs. Hanley,” I told her after the others had left. “I really think this will work better for all of us.”

“I agree. Now, you’d better go get ready for those people,” she smiled, and I could tell it was time for me to go.

After we got back to the gate, I asked the guard how things looked outside and was informed that only two Raptors had escaped the three firefights throughout the day. A dozen armed guards would go with all of us and they would be expected to return the next morning.

* * *

“You see guys?” Two Toe asked the other Raptors.

“See what?” the three of his friends questioned him at once.

“How those new foods just keep coming out of that metal cave. You see, it’s like we can’t seem to kill them fast enough.”

“But we will! Oh yes we will!” he thought to himself.

“Isn’t that a good thing?” Likes to Talk looked quizzically at Two Toe.

“If they didn’t keep killing us in return it would be real good. The thing I don’t like is them killing us. We need to learn how to kill them and not get killed by them.”

“Yeah, how do we do that?” Likes to Talk asked.

“If I knew that, we’d already be doing it.” Two Toe looked around at this newest pack.

“How about killing them at night?” Smells A Lot interjected an idea of his own.

“Good idea, but it’s already been tried and it failed.”

“So, how do we kill them and not die?” Likes to Talk wanted to know.

“Like I said before, I don’t know.” Two Toe looked at his fellow Raptors. “But we do need to figure it out fast. When

the two of us ran into you, we were escaping from another failed attempt. Those new foods are putting things in our way—making it harder to get to them.”

* * *

We all made it to camp unharmed, and we weren't even sure the Raptors came near us. But, I felt eyes on me during the trip back. Maybe the Raptors weren't the mindless reptile-birds that people seemed to think they were, or maybe something else was watching us instead. Who knows, it could have just been my imagination. Either way, we made it back. This time we had a radio to hook up, and we wouldn't have to walk for a short conversation again.

On the way in, I told those outside the palisade to be on the lookout for Raptors and briefed them on what had happened at the ship.

We now had thirty new residents, plus the dozen extra guards that would leave the next morning. We still had more than half a day's work left, so I figured we had best get started.

I told the workers to have their families find a place to rest and took the Electrician Techs (E.T.s) to the job sight.

“Hey Wagner,” I heard James call out. “What do you want done first? The wall lighting or find out what's upstairs?” I had continued to walk in his direction—the new volunteers walking behind me.

“James,” I replied, stepping aside to let him see the others. “These are Dale, Ward, Terrelle, Mike, Allan, John and Ken. They will be working with you and your men.”

“I’ve got plenty of laborers already, Randal. I need skilled workers. No offense meant.”

“None taken by me, but I happen to know my way around a light fixture or two,” Dale announced.

“Actually,” I jumped in, “all of these folks have a background with electronics and have volunteered to help get things going.”

“What about those on the ship?” James asked.

“Another five volunteers to help there as well,” I told him.

“Let me guess,” he looked around, but had a smile on his face. “This was all your idea?”

“Mostly,” I told him. “But I got the idea from you being grumpy and causing all sorts of havoc in the camp.”

“I did no such thing.” He looked wounded.

“Gotcha!” I told him as I pointed a finger to my head. We all had a short laugh.

“Boy, Wagner,” he paused, shaking his head, “I really needed that. And now that I’ve got you people,” he gestured with his hands, “maybe we can get some of this place lit properly before we die of old age.”

I stood around and watched as he talked to the others and found out their backgrounds. He showed them where they could be best put to use. With this new help, he split his other two techs, giving each of them a helper, and he assigned new jobs. He ended up keeping Terelle with him,

as she was the most qualified of the group, to help him with his project. The tech that had been assisting him was given a helper and was to restart work on the wall lighting. The last three had been assigned to the other wall when not busy working on temporary floor lighting. With all of this going on, the laborers became much busier and I could see progress happening all around. I then went to spend a few minutes with Loranda and the boys; something I hadn't had the time to do much of lately.

Chapter 8

THE NEXT WEEK was like a blur. We had daily shipments of light fixtures and the supplies for them. We had two herds of herbivores come through. We gleaned one Triceratops for meat, and this kept us busy for two days and which turned out to be good eating—almost like beef. Carla even made some jerky out of this new kind of meat that wasn't too bad; though she wasn't really that happy with it.

The crops were starting to sprout what would eventually become food, the palisade was finally braced and secured at the base and the walkway went up.

With the radio wired, I was able to call and tell those at the ship that the herds were coming and how to prepare Triceratops meat. Honestly, Carla told this to the ship's cooks over the radio for me. I don't know cook language.

We didn't see any sign of the two raptors or any other carnivores other than some Pterodactyls flying by over

head. It was actually, a very good week. I never expected icing on the cake.

“Randal Wagner.” Only my wife spoke to me in that tone. “You get your butt over here this instant!”

“Now what did I do?” I asked her, wondering exactly that. I hadn’t done anything that I could foresee to get her to act this way.

“Oh, you’ve done quite enough, thank you. Running around here like you own the place, telling people what to do and getting me pregnant again. I tell you, you just don’t have a clue, do you?” she ranted.

“I what?” I looked ready to argue. “I’ve been working just like everyone,” then it hit me. “You’re pregnant? Well how in . . .”

“Oh, come on now!” she told me, a big smile on her face. “Don’t tell me you don’t know how that happens. Boy, you must be getting old and losing your memory.”

“Obviously, I’m not too old,” I smiled back, love gushing from my heart. “I guess this means you join the light duty patrol then.”

“Oh no you don’t!” The smile wavered. “I’ll not be set aside while I’m not even showing. You can just take that idea, and . . .,” she smiled again. “You old coot, you had me going there, didn’t you?”

“Turn about is fair play, Prego.”

“Yeah, well we’ll see who turns about tonight old man.”

After a couple of minutes of hugging and kissing, I let her go and explained that I had to go back to work. Sometimes a few minutes can change your whole life.

Since I had just been outside before learning that Loranda was pregnant, it was time for me to check the cavern again. Work inside was moving much faster than before, but the results were not as evident as the majority of the work going on was to install wall lighting. This was to be hooked up to the micro-hydro power plants. These were not easy to install. Holes had to be drilled into the stone to support the fixtures and the wiring had to be brought to the wall without causing a hazard. Some conduit was brought in from the ship and was run to meet the wall in a channel cut from the floor. This was done on both sides of the bridge, and down a few yards, as to not ruin the majesty of crossing it.

The full extent of the caverns' walls was more than I imagined, and it was quite nerve-racking to keep working in an environment that you don't really know.

I could hear a commotion coming from the area near the bridge, when I heard Dale tell James, "There he is right now." He pointed at me.

"Here I am what?" I asked back.

"I was just going to have Dale here go and get you," remarked James.

"Okay, well, I'm here." I looked around; so were all the others, laborers and electricians alike. "If you want a pay raise, I'm the wrong person to talk to."

"Actually, that might not be a bad idea," said Dale.

"Okay now," James stopped him short. "Knock it off. We have something to show you, Mr. Wagner," he told me. Then he flipped a couple of switches.

I hadn't realized just how much work must have went into wiring the whole lower area with lighting fixtures, but the sight was amazing. After all this time, it finally seemed worth it. This was the first step to understanding what was in here.

"As you can see," James was telling me, "we put the lighting above normal head level. This is to keep accidents to a minimum and to get the most light possible per fixture. This is also why the fixtures are spaced apart as they are. They don't overlap so much that we lose a lot of light, yet they do overlap some, keeping shadowy areas to a minimum."

"Congratulations guys and lady," I found myself saying. "The first step is now complete. I think you owe yourselves a pat on the back. I would offer more, but I don't know what I have to offer."

"How about some time with our families?" Terrelle asked.

"Sounds good to me," I replied. "But I don't know what to offer the rest of you." I gestured to the laborers whose families weren't here. "Would some time off do it for you?"

There was a general tone of agreement, so I told them to go ahead and take some extra time off.

While the workers took that time, I let the others (those not at the stations anyway) come in and take a look at what had been done. With the lighting around the walls, the fixtures on the floor were no longer needed.

I, like most people, took my family in to see this wonderful step and I was surprised by some of the responses I heard. Mostly I heard things like, "It's so dark above", "There's so much more to do", and "It looks scary to me." Then there were those who just saw things differently. For instance, my

own children, when they saw it. “Wow!” Michael exclaimed. “I bet hide and seek will be fun in here.”

“Yeah?” Kevin asked. “Who will want to seek a hider in all this?”

“Me find you already,” Kyle added. “You don’t hide so good. Oops, I forget to counted. One . . . two . . . three . . .”

“Kyle honey . . .,” Loranda smiled. “You boys aren’t playing hide and seek. Maybe after it’s all done okay?”

“I can play only little game?” Kyle asked.

“No, not even a little game. I don’t want you to get lost.”

“I want Dad to play game, me.”

“I’ll tell you what Kyle,” I told him, “when I know it’s safe, I’ll carry you on my shoulders and let you see a lot more. Until then, I want you to stay next to Mommy.”

“Okay, and brothers too.” Kyle looked pleased.

“Yes, and brothers too. Now I need you to go back with Mommy and brothers and be good.” I gave each of the boys a hug, and then I gave Loranda a hug and kiss. I had to get back to work.

* * *

“What do you want to do about these stairways?” James asked me.

“Well, from the angle of the mountainside, I can’t picture much being on this lower side or going very high. It’s just too close to the outside world, here. So, let’s run a line of temporary floor fixtures along the wall, if possible, and figure out what we’ve got from there.

“That’s not really what I meant,” he informed me. “I’m talking about the lack of handrails. I’m worried that someone might fall.”

“I’ll tell you what,” he looked at me, “I’ll let the work crews finish the walkway, then I’ll have them all work to get some trees ready and then bring them in here to make a railing for the steps. For now, we’ll have to be careful.”

I frowned. “I don’t like it, but I don’t know what else to do at this time.”

“Well, for now we’ll just keep the light strands on one side of the steps and use the other side for traffic.”

“I’ve got a question for you,” I told him. “Do you have enough strands to come up both of these stairways and go up both of the stairways on the sides closest to the rear too?”

“I’m sure I’ve got the wiring and fixtures, but I don’t know if we’ll have enough of a power supply, why?”

I told him, “Because I’d like to be able to bring a group up here and start scouting around to see if there is any clue as to how those before us were able to light up all of this area.”

“I see. Actually, that would make a sensible person wonder now wouldn’t it?”

“It’s got me wondering, and by the look on your face, I’m guessing it bothers you too. Right?”

“You’re right. I just can’t figure it out.”

* * *

“Okay guys, I want you to grab a double arm load of torches and follow me.” I grabbed as many as I could carry

safely and led them all into the middle of the two stairways at the top. We then went and picked up two more torches each and lit one of them while carrying the unlit torch in our opposite hand. We still carried our weapons; however, we kept them slung, since we had seen no sign of life in here other than the river and one skeleton, which we made off-limits.

We already had temporary light fixtures going up the four stairways closest to the entrance. They were subsequently tied to what amounts to a hand carved handrail, which ran across the top of the walkway, carved from stone. Whoever made this place spent a lot of time working on it.

“Alright everyone,” I looked around to make sure that everyone was here. “I want two groups, no more. We don’t know what’s here, so no one strays for any reason. If you need to use the restroom, say something before it becomes an emergency. This way, we can get back here as a group and you can go downstairs and do your thing. Jake, you take your half up that stairway there.” I pointed to the left of our entrance. “I’ll take my group to the right.”

This happened to be the stairway that had been cut partially through. “Don’t go touching anything this time around people. Let’s see what we’ve got and take notes.” I turned around and started up the steps to the level above us. After I passed the narrowed area in our stairway, I looked over and noticed Jake and his group going up the other stairway. I kept going in the direction I had chosen for us. At the top of the stairway I turned right, leading me toward Jake again, but only until the first of the small stairways on the left started to wind its way up to a cave entrance.

There were several of these smaller stairways around us, but I wanted to check each cave, one at a time. In front of the cave entrance there was a flat porch-like area, and there was a smallish hole on each side of the entrance itself. I put a torch close to one of these holes and noticed that it only went in about eight or nine inches.

“Hmm . . .,” I thought to myself. I put my lit torch into it—handle first. This was a good fit, so I lit my other torch and put it on the other side. This was going to be better than I could hope for, I thought, and decided that we needed to go back to the middle where we had left the torches. After acquiring another torch from James, and lighting it, we did just that.

I noticed Jake coming back down to see what was going on and I pointed to the cave entrance with two lit torches on either side. After he closed the gap, I told him, “It seems that our torches may well be used to help light the area, as well as remind us of where we’ve been. So, I suggest taking some extra torches for this purpose. I am, however, concerned that you came here alone to talk with me as I specifically said that no one leaves the group.”

“But Randal, I can see . . .,” his voiced trailed off while his right hand pointed to his group.

“No buts about it,” I told him. “I meant what I said, and it goes double for anyone I put in charge. Now grab some of these torches and go.”

I could see Jake’s eyes enough to know that he wasn’t happy with being reprimanded, but he picked up several torches and went back to his group. I also picked up more torches and kept passing them back until everyone was

carrying a total of four each—including myself. With extra torches in hand, we went back to the entrance of the first small cave and I stepped inside.

I don't know what I expected, but I know it was not what I found. I went farther in to let the others enter behind me. I think that everyone was equally impressed with the interior of this cave, though I'm not sure that "cave" is the best word for it. Having a six and a half foot entry made it seem as if it would be a hole in the wall, but inside was a real living space. Off to one side was a stone fire place with a hole for ventilation that went up to some unknown place. Next to it was what I could only describe as a rock wall-enclosed storage area that I figure must have been for a wood supply for the fireplace. There was a corner top area above the fireplace, which looked like you could just set water on it in a pot to boil or keep hot. On the opposite side from the storage area was a long counter-like area with a double depression in it like a double sink without a drain. Closer to the entrance was a stone table and benches with the table attached to the floor.

On the other side of the room, was a wraparound stone bench that was obviously part of the living rock. This formed a u-shape with the entrance wall, side wall and a wall across from the entrance wall. It only came ten of the twenty feet available into the open chamber.

Going farther back into the "cave" brought us to a room that for all purposes looked like a pantry or storage room, with what looked like cut-outs in the walls – like built-in shelving. Next, we came to a couple of rooms with only a narrow doorway-like entrance and some "shelving" above

the three foot range along two of the walls. At the very back of the cave were two rooms across from each other. One had a one foot “wall” like the wood storage area and the other smaller area was blank except for a couple of small “shelves” cut into one wall. Inside this home-like cave were several more small “holes,” like those at the cave entrance.

“Well, well,” James started, “would you just look at this place. All the comforts of home. Okay—almost.”

“When can we move in?” asked Jeremy Halps, one of the men who was supposed live in the second cave—until things started getting crazy too quickly.

“No one is moving in to anywhere just yet.” I told him. “We have to check each one of these and see what we’ve got first. Although, the idea of having a little family privacy does sound enticing, I’ll admit.” I could see the smile on the faces of everyone here. “Let’s go see what else we can find.”

We must have checked at least seventy of these caves. It took us hours to do so, less one bathroom call, for most everything. We were about nearly exhausted, when we found a cave that was significantly different. Oh, we had found that some caves had only one bedroom, or three, but the basic design was consistent. Not this new one though. It started differently with the landing—this was much larger. When we entered the opening, also larger, there were no home comforts at all. In fact, it was shaped like a long flat bottomed tube. After traveling a few hundred feet, we turned back and left the cave alone.

During our bathroom break, I made the decision to have the torches snuffed out behind us, in order to keep

them from burning out while not in use. Since some of those had burned out, our two groups had to go around replacing several of the first ones we had left behind. Now, I would need to figure out some way to mark this unknown, for future reference. The only telltale sign was the larger, rounded tunnel entrance and the distance from it to the nearest “home caves.”

It took us several more days to check all of the caves in this cavern and we had to have others making torches all day, everyday. We found two more of the larger, tunnel-like caves, one opposite from the first, and one at 90 degrees from the first two, leading farther into the mountain. This last one had an ornate design around the entrance and had a sloped ramp at a much easier grade than any other in here.

It was still morning and due to the congestion in the outside cave, I let families start moving into the “homes”. I had the size of the home match the size of a family when possible. Most of our families moved nearest to the ornate cave, since we figured it must have some significance, and then I got on the radio and called the ship, telling Captain Hanley that we were now letting people move into what we were calling “Home Caves” and how many more families we could fit versus the sizes of those homes left.

“Mr. Wagner,” she said in near disbelief. “That’s nearly everyone in the ship. It would only leave about 800 or so people.”

“Yes, well? Isn’t that good news?” I asked her.

“It sure is: running water, air flow, security and family privacy too. How can you beat that?”

“I didn’t say security,” I told her. “There are still three tunnels we don’t know about, but there are also some field-like areas on the bottom of this cavern, and irrigating them would be fairly simple.”

“That’s wonderful news! What can I do to help with all of this?” she asked me.

“We most need those who want to live here to know that the noise will have to be kept down until we know whether it is truly safe or not. In which case, we may have to make it safe. Then, we can act normally.”

I thought for a second, “If you have anyone with any underground skills that would be beneficial.

“Do well, Randal,” she replied. “I’ll start sending people over in the morning.”

Chapter 9

SINCE IT WAS still early, I took another work party out to the ship's path, and we salvaged several of the larger pieces of the ship's hull—those small enough for us to carry into the cavern, that is. There were a couple of snapped pieces of I-Beam from that area which we brought into the cavern for supports. After that, I had another work crew cut and strip trees, bringing some of them into the cavern. Due to the larger amount of people staying here, we had doubled our cooks. Carla was in charge. We also had more small children to keep entertained, we doubled the guards for security reasons and still had the electricians and many others install lighting to the railing around the cavern. That lighting alternated—one fixture to the inside and one to the outside of the railing. This was much faster than mounting them to a wall. All others were busy making torches for the cavern. We would need as many torches as possible.

We completed moving all of our family possessions, and then we started moving the food supplies into the homes of those families I most trusted. Moving the rest of the food would have to wait until tonight. Right now, we had things to do while there was still daylight.

* * *

I was trying to stay with my work crew, but I would occasionally have to go help with the new arrivals, showing them to their quarters and telling them what to do and not to do.

Things were going well until just before dusk. We heard screams and yelling from the work crew that was out salvaging scrap metal. Then, I heard gun shots. I had been leaving the gates of our outpost, when I heard this and told one of the guards to get the 25 mms and .50-cals to the wall with an additional 20 guards. As the guard was leaving, I yelled to those at the trees to get inside now and gathered two other outside guards to come with me and see what was going on.

We only made it about 100 yards, when we saw others running toward us, waving for us to turn around and run back. This was not good. It took a lot to make these guys run like this. I heard sporadic weapons fire, and it continued to get closer. I couldn't just turn and run.

"Okay, guys," I said to the two men with me. "Lock and load, we might be the difference between life and death for this whole group."

Several of the crew ran past us, terror clearly controlling them. It was all I could do to get two of them with rifles to stand with us and tell what was happening.

“Tttt T-Rex, sssma smaller th than th th this mmm mon, monster,” one of them was able to tell me, stuttering badly, obviously past the point of normal fear. It was about this time that I saw Jake, Mike Caldwell, Bill Sanders and two others I only knew by face, running for all they were worth.

Behind them was a massive dinosaur that resembled a “Spinosaurus” from an old movie I had seen as a child, except it was much larger than the movie portrayed and it had three spines along the top of its back—one in the middle and one to each of its left and right sides at a 25 or 30 degree angle.

I aimed my M-203 and fired right in front of this monster, at the same time others fired too. With two grenades exploding near this “Tri-Spinosaurus”, it was enough to make it stop for a few seconds in which we were running with the others. I loaded my grenade launcher again, on the run, and heard the footsteps gaining on us. Three of us turned and fired again, once more slowing this creature just enough for us to turn and run to safety—behind the walls we built.

This time, our shots didn’t slow this monster for nearly as long and I had no time to reload or do anymore. I ran to the gate, which was mostly closed. Only a few feet of open area remained and there were three of us running for it.

Just as I thought I was surely dead, I heard a blood curdling scream over the sounds of gunfire. I kept running,

entering just behind Jake and the door slammed shut; the bar slid into place.

“Everyone, into the cavern now!” I yelled and continued running to the cave entrance.

Men were piling into the cave as fast as they could, but even then, we lost another guard trying to run from the wall to the cave entrance. As well as we thought we had built our wall, this “3-Spine”, as we would start to call it, went right through it—like a person snapping a twig under his foot. This didn’t help matters, and we went to the back of the cave watching this “3-Spine” cave in the door we had built, which also caused some damage to the cave entrance itself.

We were fortunate enough to not have an entrance it could get through. However, it did keep trying for over a half hour. When I realized that it wasn’t going to get to us, I decided to call the ship and let them know about it.

“Hello Randal,” Captain Hanley said pleasantly. “What can I do for you?”

“I’m calling to warn you that there is a huge carnivore over here,” a large roar interrupted me, “that is at least twice the size of a T-Rex. You need to get all of your people inside the ship and close it down tight. No noise, no outside guard, or it might tear the ship apart.”

“Are you serious?” she asked. “I heard that roar, but I find it hard to believe that it could be that kind of a danger.”

“Trust me on this, please. This thing went through our palisade without slowing down, and that’s after it was hit with at least three HEAP grenades, a few .50-cal shots and

some short range 25s. I think all we did was piss it off.” I told her seriously.

“What about the LR ammo?” she started to sound concerned.

“If the creature was somewhere else, maybe, but we have our crops out there which we’re counting on to use for seed. We’ll need what we can use for food production, and the white phosphorous would ruin it. We just can’t take that chance at this time, sorry.”

“All right then, I’ll get my people inside,” another roar came from “Jumbo” outside, “Hope it works. I’ll call you later,” and the connection was cut.

I looked at James, who was looking around the corner. “Did you hear that last part?” I asked.

“Just something about calling you later,” he replied.

“All right,” I mumbled. “I hope she knows what she’s doing.”

Since it was already dusk, I had two men stay on guard at the cave, just in front of the supplies. One had a 25 mm loaded with LR ammo and one with a .50-cal rifle. Then I set up work parties and had the supplies moved near the ornate cave entrance. Even with a much larger work force, it took a few hours to finish the job. Jumbo had left after he wasn’t able to get to us, but I wouldn’t let anyone go outside. It was just too dangerous. After a head count, I found out that we had received nearly 500 more people but had lost seven men to the 3-Spine. Unfortunately, three of those men had families with small children, and that made for an even worse ache in my heart.

The next day started bright and sunny, with normal outside noises heard from the cave entrance. After such a

disturbing night, this was completely unexpected, but all was not good. As I looked at our palisade, garden and entrance door, I could only try to imagine the time it would take to set things right again. I decided to call the ship and see how they were doing and give them a *sitrep* (situation report).

I kept trying to call for over an hour, but received no reply. This was not usual or good in any way. “What did this mean?” I wondered.

I didn’t have time to speculate. There were things that just had to be done first, so I rounded up as many guards as possible. We had to have work crews start on repairing the palisade and door. It would be somewhat easier with many of the logs pre-cut; we only had to replace those that were damaged. The garden was a disaster. A few tried replanting— saving all that was possible. All available guards would stay on constant watch with weapons ready and listening for any hint of danger.

Throughout the day I continued to call the ship but with the same results.

It was a long, hard day for all of us, but the door was repaired and the palisade was up again. Not quite as strong as it was before, additional repairs would have to wait.

We didn’t post guards outside the cave that night, but you could still feel the sense of relief—that we had some defense to stop some of the smaller creatures around here.

The only other good news we had that day was that we finished the second level lighting which was turned on shortly before dusk. This made it possible to see the housing areas much better. It now limited our need of torches to actual homes.

When the last set was finished, Dale came up to me. “Mr. Wagner, I have enough lighting equipment to light up four, maybe five homes, and then we are out. What do you want me to do?”

“Well, do we have any doctors living here yet?” I asked him with a smile on my face.

“You know we do. Why would . . . ah, I get you. You want them to have lighting first for working on the injured. Fair enough, two doctors and one dentist it is.”

“And Dale?”

“Yes.”

“Use whatever is left for your home. You deserve it.” I told him.

“Randal, after what we’ve been through, we all deserve it.”

“Just the same, after the dentist and doctors, I want your home done next.”

“Okay, I’ll sure do it.” He had a gleam in his eyes as he turned and walked away.

The second day, after the 3-Spine attack, was overcast with intermittent light showers. I still could not reach the ship, and again couldn’t take a group to check on it. We had too much work yet to do to repair our palisade, and I had work parties again cutting and stripping trees while under heavy guard. In front of the palisade, especially the gate, I had people putting in what amounted to pungi sticks angled to pierce any large predators that came at them—hopefully, impaling them before getting to the palisade itself.

It was still a good four hours until dusk when a guard called for everyone to get inside quickly. We all did so

and soon found a large pack of Raptors closing in on our outpost.

With our best marksmen using the 25 mms and .50-cal guns, it was only a couple of minutes work to kill three of them and scare the rest off, leaving the dead behind them.

An hour later, with no sign of the others, I sent all the armed guards out and work crews to bring in the dead Raptors. As soon as they were behind the gate, we closed it and gave our prizes to Carla and her crew. We had chicken that night.

The third day started as dreary as the day before, with less precipitation, and more work ended up being accomplished. We completed the first row of “impalers” and started on the second, again nearest the gate, and there was no sign of any dinosaurs on the ground. The lighting in the four homes was also complete with only a few grumbles, and these were from some of the newest bunch to arrive.

Later in the day, the weather cleared, becoming bright and sunny again; but I still could not reach the ship with the radio. Now that our defenses were reestablished, I gathered most of the guard unit and had them prepare to go to the ship with me. I left enough of a guard force here to watch the entrance and a couple extras. This left just enough to guard a work crew, enabling them to gather limbs and twigs for making torches. We would take all the heavy weapons except for one .50-cal sniper rifle and one M-16/M-203. While out there, we had no idea what we might find, so we took our best and left the others with the protection of the cavern as their best defense.

Getting to the ship was uneventful. That was quickly changed upon arrival.

The ship had been opened like a paper sack and the 3-Spine was on the ground, dead, one of his arms blown off. A huge pool of congealed blood centered around the wound. The palisade wall around the ship was ruined and there were several dead guards on the ground interspersed with a couple of Raptors. The place looked like a blood bath. The most important problem for us was the group of live Raptors standing around eating dead bodies.

I had everyone stop, get down and stay quiet while the .50-cals and 25 mms were brought up to my position. One 25 mm had LR ammo in it, and I had Kazak change it out for SR ammo. When all of them were ready, I gave the hand signal to fire at will. Instantly, four Raptors went down, and two more dropped before the rest knew what had happened. This still left five Raptors to deal with and they were now running away from us. By the time they were out of sight, there were only three alive making a total of eight killed.

Everyone reloaded before we all approached the ship as a group. The smell of death was thick in the air. The sights of the dead were gruesome, making many of us vomit from the combination.

As the dead were strewn about the outside of the ship, mostly in pieces, there were also several weapons. I had half the men do a weapons and ammo search, bringing all of it into a pile. The heavy weapons present were two .50-cal rifles, one obviously bent, and one 25 mm ATG. I had these and a couple of M-16/M-203 combos checked out, loaded with the correct ammo and traded for four of the regular M-16 rifles. For now, the rest was left behind

while we located a way into the ship that wasn't difficult to get through.

The inside of the ship was a wreck and full of dead bodies—thousands of bodies. Some were obviously guards, but most were just passengers. We again gathered weapons and ammo, placing most of it outside in our pile. We did retrieve one more .50-cal in good condition, and that was allotted to another capable person in exchange for an M-16.

We could tell that there had been a panic, as several groups of people were huddled together. Some looked like they tried to cover themselves with the bodies of the dead to stay alive. It hadn't worked.

We went up to another level and found the same sort of senseless slaughter. We found no survivors here either.

The next level and the one after that told the same story though we did find two dead Raptors on the top floor of the ship's personnel areas.

Since it seemed that all had perished, we started looking through the storerooms to see what useful items we could find. That's when we started running into survivors. The doors to the storerooms had been closed for self preservation, and they kept the Raptors out. Those survivors we did find were hungry and showing the first signs of dehydration; so I had a unit start giving treatment immediately.

We searched the whole ship: every room, closet and cabinet and found nearly 300 survivors—mostly children that had been placed there by their parents for protection. All were common folk except one electrician who had been working in the lower levels when things went terribly wrong. Since he didn't have a weapon, he stayed where he was and

kept quiet. Luckily for us, this electrician knew where many things were stored, and he was able to show us the location of two more micro-hydro plants.

We then went to the armory, where we found the rest of the weapons and ammo including two old M-60 machine guns, another .50-cal and one more 25 mm ATG. We grabbed the heavy weapons and some ammo, then closed the door, keeping it safe until we could come back. After giving them all a chance to eat, drink and clean up any really bad messes, we gathered the survivors into the area outside of the ship. Once there, we told the group that anyone with experience should pick up a weapon they were comfortable with and the rest should grab what was left. After we were ready, we walked back to our camp and relative safety.

“Mr. Wagner?” one of the survivors from the ship asked “When do we get to have our personal items?”

“Tomorrow,” I told him. “Today is for more important items.”

“Really?” The man looked at me. “What will we do about hygiene, then?”

“You’ll have to make do for now; survival comes first.” Jake motioned me over to the side, out of hearing range.

“Randal, there is a lot of grumbling amongst many of those we saved. They are grateful, but they want their own possessions.”

“I’m well aware of this, but essential supplies come first.” I motioned with a hand at all those present. “As soon as we have the rest of the weapons, ammo and most needed medical supplies, then we can let them get their stuff.”

I didn't like making those people wait, but it was necessary. Since many of the ship's compartments had been ripped open, we couldn't risk anything happening to them.

"Okay people," I called out loudly. "Those of you who are new to our group may feel it unfair that we aren't gathering your belongings at this time. My sympathies go out to you for that and all you have been through. Truth is, most of you, if not all, are in no shape to carry supplies. You are all dehydrated and half starved. The rest of us must protect you during our walk to safety. In order to gather the most important items first, we will be coming back with others while you regain your health." I could hear some grumbling.

"There will be a time very soon when we will bring your personal belongings, but medical supplies to bring you back to health and the weaponry to protect you and those others that will help carry the supplies, are of utmost importance; so please be patient." Much less grumbling this time. "We appreciate your cooperation. Thank you."

As the group of survivors surrounded by the guard detail closed in on the palisade, and safety, a herd of dinosaurs ran by. The likes of which were uncommon in any popular movies. They were larger than Utah raptors and smaller than a T-Rex, but they didn't look interested in the humans. Instead, they were heading in the direction of the ship.

"Hey Randal!" Jake asked. "What were those things?"

"Damned if I know. I'm just glad they didn't attack us. Half these people should be in a hospital."

"Yeah. Tell me about it!"

I thought to myself, "Why me? What is it about me that makes people follow me? Sure, I have some skills, but so do

many others . . . I could just as easily let someone else lead this patch of humanity”

* * *

An aroma crosses my senses.

I’m falling out of a huge tree, but I’m unsure why. Is that water below me? What is that I see swirling around?

I smelled the aroma again, stronger this time. It smells like coffee.

“Randal, honey” Boy, that voice is familiar.

“Randal, wake up”

“Hmmm?” He’s coming around now,” another familiar voice announces.

“What? Where am I?” I ask.

“Where indeed!” My wife, Loranda shoots back. “Damned fool-hearted man.” I told you to get some rest, but you want to keep going 28 hours a day! Then you literally fall asleep on the job and get me all worried about you! Don’t do that again, you hear?!” She hands me the cup of coffee.

“Sorry, honey. I was just trying to help doctor Takahashi with all these patients,” I inform her.

“He has others helping him.” Loranda looks at me accusingly. “How are you supposed to be on guard duty all day with no sleep?”

“It seems as though I must have slept, or I wouldn’t be waking up just now.”

“Foolish man, you’ve been out for no more than four hours, and they are going to be ready to go in less than an hour, maybe forty five minutes.”

“Oh, good,” I say to her. “That means I have time to eat something then.”

“And you plan to work all day?” she asked.

“If need be, why?” I couldn’t understand her concern.

“What about time for your family?” She admonished.

“Honey, you need to understand, I have things that have to be done—fun or not!”

* * *

Randal Wagner took over 300 people with him on that first trip to the ship after the rescue. They ran into a pack of scavengers called Baryonyx. They appeared to be the same herd that we sighted the day before. It was only after killing three of these small dinosaurs that they decided to leave their meals and live.

“Jake?” Randal called after the Baryonyx had left.

“Yeah, boss?” Jake replied.

“We need to start implementing some sort of training for more guards, and we need more able bodies too.”

“Well Randal, you’ve got a little over twenty people moving the electrical equipment, a couple dozen left behind to protect the cavern and palisade, a couple dozen more working on salvaging what they can of the garden area . . .,” his voice trailed off.

“I know, and several are taking care of those we found yesterday. Once these others have had a chance to recuperate, we can put an additional 150-200 bodies to work.” Randal made the signal to move forward.

“Before we do anything else, we need to clean some of this mess. Nothing fancy, but we can’t be walking on and

tripping over the dead. Then, we can gather some of the ship's supplies."

Moving the bodies had been gruesome work, and everyone was glad when it was done. It wasn't only the young adults that wretched while working; nearly everyone ran into the body of someone they had met. The Tri-Spinosaurus sure made a ruin of things.

The next order of business was to grab as much of the medical equipment and supplies as possible from two of the medical rooms. The damage had opened the rooms to the outside elements, and salvaging as much as possible was necessary for the survival of humanity.

For those who still had empty hands, there were weapons and ammo to carry, though not so much that it would slow anyone down.

* * *

"That's quite enough, you old goat!" Loranda advised me as I came through the palisade doors after our fourth trip back from the ship.

"I do believe you're right honey" I could see the frustration in her eyes. "Just as soon as everyone is through the gates, I'll head right home."

"I believe I'll just wait with you." Loranda put her hands on her hips. "You've been doing this for three days in a row now and you keep bringing more and more stuff back. When does it end?"

"Too soon, I'm afraid."

"What do you mean by that?" she asked.

“It’s like this. Once we have everything useful from the ship, there is no more.” I tried being patient, knowing she was smarter than this.

“What about the other ships? Surely there must be more.”

“Honey . . . look around us. Do you see any other ships?”

“No.” She shook her head while answering.

“That’s right, and no one else does either. Hell, we might be the last of humanity. I hope not, but we have no way of knowing.”

“Randal?” She looked at me with sadness in her eyes.

“Have you looked at who is here, lately?”

“I’ve tried to keep track of who’s who, but I just haven’t had the time for individual introductions to everyone. Why?”

“I wasn’t talking about that. Do you realize that there are far too few men for the women we have? And I must say that there are too many young girls that I’m counting as women, though they really aren’t women at all.”

“What do you want me to do about it?” I asked, not expecting a real answer.

“You should hold a meeting with those you trust the most and come up with a way to fix things.”

By the time we had finished talking, we could see the end of the long line of people that had gone to the ship with me. Some of those still waiting to enter the gates appeared nervous. I guessed they feared for their safety. Most of the others looked solemn.

Most of those we had rescued several days ago had their belongings already. What we were bringing in now was the excess from the dead, with an occasional exception to be found.

“Dad! Hey Dad!” Kevin called out as he ran toward me.

“Yes, son, what is it?” I asked.

“Are we really digging a pool? Will we be able to go swimming in it?”

“Yes, and probably not,” I answered.

“Huh? I don’t get it.”

“Well Kevin, you are definitely digging a pool, but it’s for bathing, not swimming. “

He leaned close to me with worry in his eyes. “How will we wash . . . ah . . . you know”

“Your personal places?” I asked.

“Yes, ah . . . those.”

“Same way you would in a bath tub,” I informed him.

“But . . . won’t other people see? Won’t girls see?”

“I guess so, but you’ll get used to it after a while.”

The look on my oldest son’s face made me realize that this was the worst answer I could have given.

“Dad, that’s gross!”

“And you will no doubt see girls naked too.”

“Ew . . . yuk! I’ll just not take a bath.”

“Sorry son, but if I let you get away with that, your Mom would tan my hide.”

Kevin smiled, “Now that I’d like to see!”

“I bet you would. Now let’s get home. Your Mom is almost to the doorway.”

Chapter 10

FOR THREE MORE weeks, we continued to move supplies from the ship to the cavern. In that time, there were only two more attacks. The first was a single T-Rex; the second was a group of seven Raptors. We were lucky with the T-Rex and noticed him before he noticed us, making it possible to kill him quickly. The Raptors surprised us, killing three men and one woman before we could turn them away.

We also had some more “friendly” intruders and that made for more food, but we only killed what we needed, leaving the rest alone.

We now had a pool to wash in and electric lighting in all of the homes, even those not occupied, with thousands of fixtures left. There was a small first harvest that was used for seed and was then replanted to grow even more plants. This was done by the abandoned, second cave as we had yet to figure a way to get sunlight into the cavern, leaving

the inside crop area unused. We did have some Agra-glow lighting, the kind of light fixture and bulbs that would give off ultraviolet energy. Unfortunately, we didn't have nearly enough for so large an area; so for now it would have to wait.

We had the four radios hooked up and placed at the ends of the stairways inside the cavern. We even had a reception/transmission antenna mounted outside. It was finally starting to feel like we had a home.

Having several bicycles and two dozen various wheels, I had work crews start clearing a road to the ship's path. The logs were cut to form, and we built our first "new planet" vehicle. It looked like a large turtle but was actually like a tank. We could stay inside it and be protected from the Raptors even though a T-Rex or larger animal would probably have no problem with it. Propulsion and brakes were primitive, but it was a start, and we could have three more before our road was cleared.

We brought the incubators, lab equipment, and those piglets in early stages of growth. Moving this equipment and all the products that were needed to make it function made it our most difficult trip ever. Had we been attacked during transport, we would have almost certainly lost our chance to have one animal that we knew something about. We set up some pins for the pigs, down on the ground floor because we weren't able to use it for crops.

* * *

"Dad, when are you going to have time for us?" Michael's words stabbed like a knife in my back, making me realize that we had all been working far too much, for far too long.

“You know honey?” Loranda looked at me. “We’ve all been in need of some time as a family, and not just sleeping time—but actual interaction.”

“I guess we really haven’t had much time together for quite a while now. I’ll tell you what! I’ll go see what the others think, and maybe we can make some time for fun and relaxation.”

“It didn’t take much convincing to get everyone to agree to some time off.” I told Loranda upon my return.

“I should hope not. Life has to be worth living or you lose sight of what you’re sacrificing for.”

“What’s that mean Mommy?” Kyle asked as he made himself comfortable on my lap.

“It means that there has to be some fun in life.”

“Did you hear that Daddy? Mommy says we need to have some fun.”

“Yes Kyle, I heard her, and she’s right too.”

“Good, then I’m buggin youuuu . . . ,” Kyle strung out the last word in his usual manner. This was his explanation of rubbing his face against my whiskers, which he seemed to thoroughly enjoy.

“Does that mean we can do something too?” Kevin piped in.

“I was actually wondering if you and Michael might want to play a game with me. Maybe set it up tonight after dinner and start early in the morning.”

“Yeah!” they both intoned excitedly.

“Mhmm . . . mhmm . . . ,” Loranda cleared her throat, obviously on purpose.

“Yes, dear.”

“Where do you suppose we shall eat breakfast?” My wife could always make a person think before acting.

“I’m sure that we can have a couple of unconventional meals.”

“A couple?”

“Well, maybe through dinner tomorrow, then we can put the game away,” I explained.

“Men! And boys too!” Loranda said, exasperated. “You guys need somewhere to play your games, I swear.”

“Oh, honey, it’s just one day, and you’re the one talking about time together.”

“I didn’t expect it to be at the expense of having a home.”

“You’ll still have a” I stopped mid-sentence when I caught the smile on her face.

“Gotcha!” she exclaimed.

“Yes, yes you sure did,” I acknowledged in return.

“You boys have your fun.”

“What about me?” Kyle asked looking fairly hurt.

“You are going to help me with my forces Kyle.”

“Kevin. Mikey!” Kyle said excitedly. “I get to help Dad. Now I got to be smarter for him.”

“You’re already quite smart. Kyle and I believe you will get smarter with time, just like your brothers.”

“I’m smarter.” At that, Kyle gave me a big hug.

“I do believe it’s Kevin’s turn to get the game out.” A smile lit up on his face. “So, pick which scenario we will play.”

“Great.” Michael looked down-hearted. “That means the Pacific again.”

“Nope,” answered Kevin. “North Africa this time.”

Loranda looked at the four of us and, mumbling, stepped to the kitchen. “Guys. I’m surrounded by young and old-young guys.” Then she grinned.

Our family break ended three days later, when an opportunity for some food presented itself. A carnivore, just a little larger than a Raptor, caught herself a goat-like animal from a roaming herd. Ken Zimmerman, who was on watch with the .50-cal, shot it through the head. Seeing no other predators about, we sent out a heavily armed guard of fifty on the palisade while worker crews hauled the two corpses into the cave. Then, everyone came back in, and Adolf Shultz, who had been a butcher earlier on in his life, demonstrated to us the best places to make a cut.

He wasn’t completely correct, but his skill did get us nearly twice the normal amount of meat per animal size than usual. When it was done, he informed me that he now knew where, and where not to cut on these two natives and how he could save much more the next time he came across these species. Most of this meat tasted good after Carla cooked it with some of the flavoids she had discovered; but we found the light meat from the predator to taste like cardboard, and we discarded it to the dogs, of which we now had a grand total of 23.

Next, for irrigation and water gathering purposes, we dug channels from the river nearly to the other side of the crop area. The electricians set what Agri-glow lights we had in a pattern that would be the most useful, and the shade-loving flavoids were planted in row after row of slightly raised soil.

As we kept a nice thoroughfare that connected the bridge to the other side of the cavern, we could move about fairly freely and even bring in some logs that we built into benches and a deck by the pool.

Wherever we thought anyone could fall into the river, we put up a wall of logs or a cross mesh of them depending upon the situation. The hardest project to build was the intake and outflow of the pool, which made it possible to change out the water. This pool was also a good way to catch some fish which were very similar to rainbow trout back on Earth. After changing the water, some of our residents would go down, catch these fish first and then the pool would be opened for swimming and bathing. We had some modest people amongst us, and, as most of us did not have swimsuits, we went in our birthday suits. This caught on with most of the residents of what was now the only known community of humans on the planet.

This became our way of life, with an occasional attack by predators or trips to salvage things from the ship, and we were happy for a couple of months. Then, one day, it started to rain; and it kept raining. After four straight days, I had every available person start making two trips a day to the ship and back, and the rest of the time was spent preparing the logs and their strippings into the two areas of the cave. We were able to do this for eleven days, except for the time a T-Rex attack cost us a good ten hours. Then, due to flooding, we could no longer make the trip to the ship

Barring a couple of Raptor attacks and food gathering, we spent eight days gathering wood, even though it was still wet. After that, the water in the valley came up to

within an average of eight to ten feet from our palisade. This left only a narrow strip of land for the natives to traverse, and a roaming herd of Brontosauruses became the first victims of our impaling defenses. The herd lost three of their number before learning that they would have to step up and push the stakes down flat before they could continue. And continuing meant trampling right through our palisade and garden area.

We brought in the guards when we saw what was going to happen. We had just closed the door, locked it and placed extra logs in front of it, in order to hopefully keep any wandering monsters from coming in and watched our palisade get knocked to the ground.

Since we ran out of things to do, except the daily chores, I gathered a group of 35 men and women to ride with me into one of the tunnels. I chose the one to the left, and a work crew removed the steel and debris from the entrance. We took four large flashlights and mounted them to an equal number of the bicycles. We all carried several torches with us and matches with which to light them. We couldn't take the huge .50-cal or 25 mm rifles with us or the M-60s either; so we took all the M-16/M-203s instead. The rest of the party took M-16/12-gauge combos and the few H&K 93s that we had. We packed ammo, food, water, tire repair and first aid kits, and then took off.

We only rode for about a mile in the dark and breezy tunnel before we could see faint sunlight coming from an opening the same size as the tunnel we traversed. This tunnel must have curved ever so slightly. The breeze and faint sunlight were partly blocked due to lush vegetation

clogging most of the opening, but that wasn't all that was in the opening. There were a series of metallic bars that could keep all but the smallest critters in or out. This was the first time that we had found any sort of metal structure on this new planet.

"Well guys?" I put out with a question. "Do you think we should clear this vegetation and find out what we've got?"

"Sounds reasonable," Daniel McGuire gave his opinion.

"I can't think of a reason not to," Jim Adams seconded in turn.

"Fair enough." I got off of the bike. "Let's turn off these lights, pull out our blades, and get to it."

And that's exactly what we did. It only took about an hour to clear the tunnel. This increased the wind quite a bit, but not as much as we would have liked light-wise. I guessed this was due to the overcast conditions that had plagued us for so long.

We did get a chance to see that the valley below was filled with water, and there was a herd of Triceratops meandering around down there, eating way. Since there was nothing else to see, we bicycled back to our little town and had lunch while telling everyone around about our short little adventure.

"Do you think we could go hunt one of those 3-horns?" Jake asked with a sparkle in his eyes.

"No," I told him. "We wouldn't be able to carry enough of the meat here in time to make it worth the effort."

"Damn, I really like that meat. Oh well, we can't have everything now, can we?"

“No, we can’t,” I answered him. “But, we can clear a walkway at the cave entrance in case they go by.”

This went over really well, so we went over and did exactly that and then waited.

We waited for nearly two hours and were ready to give up when a Utah raptor went by not forty feet away. Since we were hunting for big game, we had brought a couple .50-cals and 25 mms with SR ammo. We missed the first Raptor as we were watching for our dinner to come from the other direction. But, the next five were spotted, and we opened fire upon them with a vengeance.

We downed three of them, wounded another and had to watch three of them escape all together. But, we had dinner waiting to be dragged in and had made this world just a little safer.

We waited for a few minutes and detected no threat, so we carefully walked closer to the door when those other three Raptors ran around the corner and nearly scared us to death. This wasn’t the behavior we were used to from these creatures, and it took us by surprise. Only Ralph Smith was able to get a good shot off in the first few seconds, scattering Bone and Brain matter over a few of us. This seemed to deter the last two and they turned to leave, but not soon enough. By then, we had regained our wits and we took down those two while they were trying to escape. This was one pack of Raptors that wouldn’t kill again.

For good measure, we waited again for several minutes and even went up to the door, but nothing happened.

About that time, Ernie Davis arrived with the work crew I had sent him to gather. My guard unit went outside and

posted watch so the work crew could take dinner to Adolf Shultz, who would then give the meat to Carla and her cooks.

We were closing the door, when Carla showed up and stopped us. "I'll be needing more flavoids than I've got if you expect me to do something with all those birds you killed," she exclaimed, her hands on her hips, looking defiant.

"Very well then," I told her. "Get your assistants and gather whatever you can find, and we'll keep watch for you."

"Deal," was all she said. Then she clapped her hands, which brought nearly forty people from around the corner carrying what had to be handmade bags. These bags seemed to be made from the hides of previous kills.

Out we went, keeping our eyes peeled for danger, but an hour went by before Carla was satisfied and still nothing, so back in we went.

"You know," Carla turned and looked at me. "If we had harvested more of what we planted out there, we would have a surplus of spices to use, but this darned constant rain done ruined that chance for us. We're lucky we got what we did and the seeds to replant at another time." She turned and walked off, not really needing to have a conversation, but to vent about the situation.

That night was a chicken feast like none before. Carla and her crew cooked Raptor by frying, broiling, baking and searing over a BBQ pit. We had light meat and dark meat, with and without flavoids. There was more than all of us together could eat, and that was only five of the Raptors. With the weather cooling off, we were hopeful that the other two dead Raptors would be okay tomorrow as long as they were cooked tonight and kept at a low temperature.

With the coming of the next day, came the next of the tunnels to search.

The first job was removing all the materials blocking the entrance and then it was once again time for us to find what lay ahead.

We pedaled in silence, with only four lights to guide us. This tunnel ended up being just like the one before it. The only difference here was that the air flowed out instead of coming in. After clearing the vegetation from this grill, we looked down into a valley filled with water and this time there was an Allosaurus eating away at a carcass of some sort. This was the first time we had seen one of these, and we hoped it would be the last. We then went back to town; "Randalville", it was starting to be called, and thanked God for an uneventful excursion.

Now that we had the tunnels unplugged, we could feel a breeze and smell the air clearing up. Of course, with all of this came nights tainted with a slight chill to them. The hides, being tanned, now covered the entrances to those homes in the most direct line of the cool breeze while keeping out the bulk of the wind.

Gregory Hollier was a historian of sorts and kept records of the different plants, animals, etcetera, that we came across in this new world of ours. When I told him about the Allosaurus, he looked puzzled, and asked me to describe it again. After I did so, he looked more puzzled than before; so I asked him about it.

"What's wrong?" I asked him. "You look concerned."

"Well, I'll tell you . . .," he picked up his notes, "we have found species from the Cretaceous period, the Jurassic period, and some I've never even heard of."

“Why is this problem?” It was my turn to be concerned.

“If I could pinpoint a specific period from Earth . . .” he started, “I could figure out what to prepare for and what to expect to run into. But this place doesn’t make any sense as far as our Earth history relates. It is already strange enough that those Utah raptors, T-Rex and other known dinosaurs just happen to be like those on Earth. Add to that a town sized area that had to be inhabited at one time by beings very similar to ourselves—too similar by that skeleton found in here.”

“Come on,” I interrupted, “what is it you are getting at?”

“I’m almost there,” he replied with a scowl on his face. “After your find yesterday, I went to check that grill today, the one at the end of the tunnel, and I tried to make a small cut in it with a hacksaw.” He held up a finger. “But guess what? I couldn’t make a scratch on it no matter how hard I tried. You should see the blade. To make things stranger, I don’t think I’ve ever seen or heard of a metal that looks like that grill. The craftsmanship is too good. Joints were there, but no signs of welding—none. I can’t detect anything about it that looks like it was made by any process I’ve ever heard of. Not one flaw, and it’s embedded into rock or some other substance. Again, without one single flaw. Add all of this to the flawless work on the stone here, for instance, and the hand rail, and I think that some beings, far more advanced than us, have already lived and died here.” His emotions started to show, desperation seeping into his voice. “If that’s the case, then how are we going to survive here?”

“That’s an awful lot to think about, and I will do some thinking on it,” I answered sincerely. “But, as to your

question at the end, I have one for you. What choice do we have?"

He shrugged his shoulders, turned around and went back into his home; this was usual for him when a discussion was complete.

I spent the rest of the day checking on everyone and walked around reflecting on what I had heard.

* * *

I woke up wondering where I was. Prior to being awakened by Loranda, I had been dreaming of the days on Earth. I tried to comprehend just what it was that she was saying.

"Randal Wagner," she insisted, as I shook the cobwebs from my brain. "Get up, Bill says there was contact on the radio. Now, GET UP!"

"What?" I snapped awake. "What kind of contact?"

"I don't have any idea, but he wants you to get to Dale Bailey's right now," she said as I was trying to stand.

"What time is it?" I asked while putting on my socks.

"Early, or late, hell who cares, just get going!"

"Alright already, I'm going!" Off I went, stumbling out the doorway and down the steps, across the walkways and up another stairway.

"Dale?" I called mildly.

"Randy, come on in here!" he called a little louder than I had, and I entered his home. He was sitting at his table with the radio on it. "Falling bird, this is wrecked carriage, how do you read?"

“This is falling bird; I read you 9 out of 10, over.”

“Falling bird, do you have confirmation of signal location yet?”

“No, negative, I don’t have . . . hold on . . . yes, I have signal location. Stand by.”

Other people were now showing up at Dales home, James amongst them.

“James?” I asked. “Would you . . .” I was interrupted.

“I’m about twenty two minutes out from your location, what can you tell me?”

“We’ll have someone waiting for you, but be careful. The local wildlife isn’t friendly, and is very dangerous, over.”

“Do you happen to have a doctor there with you? Over.”

“I’ll make sure both of them are there by the time you arrive. What should we expect? Over.”

“My wife has a piece of metal stuck into her abdomen, loosing blood fast. Over.”

“Can you tell me her blood-type? Over.”

“Yeah, it’s A Negative. Over.”

“All right then.” Dale was saying. “We’ll do what we can when you get here. Anything else? Over.”

“Not until I get there, but thank you. Over and out.”

“What did you want?” James asked me.

“Would you take everyone here and have them help you clear the path to the cave’s door?” I asked him. “I will round up a group of guards, grab the heavy weapons, and get the doctors.”

“You’ve got it Randal, I’ll see you there.”

“And James, nobody goes out until we get there. I don’t want any dead heroes.”

“Fair enough.” He told me, and then turned. “All right guys, you heard the man. Let’s go clear the path, we got company comin’.”

I told Dale to stay there with the radio, and ran out to round up the others.

It took me about twelve minutes to find everyone and get them moving. With the path not yet cleared, we all helped clear the way, hurrying near the end after hearing a large predator walking around near the entrance.

“25’s load with LD.” I whispered. “We need to take him down, now.”

Kazak had his ammo changed and was aiming at a T-rex before I had finished whispering. He braced himself and fired in one smooth motion, and T-rex was minus most of his head. There was no need for a second shot.

Had it been under different circumstances, I would have worries about the soil, garden, etc, but constant rain had ruined any possibility of any garden growing. Right now we didn’t have much time to deal with such problems. We looked around for signs of any other dangers, and luckily didn’t find any. Within two minutes of unlocking and opening the door, we were able to see the shuttle heading down, toward us.

“Okay people; let’s make a secure perimeter so they can land.” I yelled to no-one in particular.

We made a three sided perimeter, the fourth side being the rock face with our entrance. The doctors and those few nurses we had stayed in the cave for safety’s sake.

Jake noticed that the shuttle was coming in at a tilted angle, and mentioned it so we could adjust, and be prepared

for a possible crash. We watched the shuttle land, though a little harder than was what I would call safe, and we could hear the engine start to wind down. The door opened to reveal a man who was drenched in sweat, tears streaming down his face, and carrying a young girl in his arms who was also crying profusely. He stepped down and to one side, out of the way, and set the girl down. He then went to his knees, still hugging the girl, and cried like a man tormented.

The doctors rushed into the shuttle as soon as possible, but realized within seconds that the woman inside was clearly dead beyond recovery. Akiro Takahashi appeared in the doorway long enough to look at me and shake his head in a negative, letting me know what we had all guessed, but hoped against.

I asked a couple of strong, middle aged men to please take a hide in, and carry the woman into the cavern.

“I hate to interrupt your grieving.” I started saying, really meaning it. “But we can’t stay out here, it’s too dangerous.”

“Daddy?” The little girl sobbed.

“I don’t care what happens to me anymore.” The man stated, tears still flowing like a waterfall.

“I don’t believe that one bit.” I admonished. “If that were the case, you wouldn’t have landed safely. You still have your daughter to think about, and she is going to need you now, more than ever, if I’m guessing correctly.”

“You are, but it just hurts so much.”

“Look, is it okay if one of our nurses takes your little girl inside for a minute, without you?” I asked.

“No.” He announced quickly. “She’s all I have left.”

“Look. She’ll be right over there, just inside the cave. You can keep your eyes on her, but it’s necessary that you see something that I don’t think she’s ready for, that will explain a lot.”

“No further than the entrance, you promise?”

“You have my word.” I told him.

“Alright, but I’m watching.” The tears weren’t as prominent as before.

One of the nurses hurried over to the man’s daughter and asked her to walk with the nurse.

“I want my daddy.” The little girl cried.

“He’ll be right behind us.” She told the girl, looking at the girl’s father. “Right?” She asked him.

“It’s okay honey, I’ll follow you. I won’t let you out of my sight, I promise.”

The little girl looked at her father, and cast her eyes down. “Okay.” She pouted, leaving with the nurse.

“Now.” The man said. “What is so important that I just have to see it RIGHT NOW?”

I walked him around the front of the shuttle and pointed behind, at the dead T-rex, laying in the water, under the cover of some trees. “This planet is full of these, and other dangerous creatures. It’s not safe out in the open like this. That T-rex was only killed a few minutes ago, and there’s no telling if there are more around right now.”

“My god.” He exclaimed. “What kind of world is this?”

“Right now isn’t a good time to talk about it. There are nearly forty of us risking our lives while discussing what’s what.” I told him sternly. “Now, can we please get to safety before it’s too late?”

“Yes, I’m sorry. I had no idea.” He was saying as I put my arm around his still shaking shoulder, leading him to the cave.

In the short time it took us to get to the entrance, I noticed that someone had closed the door to the shuttle, and called in the guards, motioning for one of them to close the door to the cave, and lock it.

* * *

“I’m Damon Jameson.” The man from the shuttle told me. “And this is my daughter Michelle.”

It had taken one day to have a funeral for his wife, not saying anything to anyone except his deceased wife and their child. Two more days passed before he would come out again from the home we had assigned to him. Many of us really felt sorry for him, but we had already had our own doses of reality given to us since our landing here. I had told him my name, and that when he was ready, I would be there to talk with him. It was now the morning of the fourth day, and he seemed to finally be snapping out of his reverie a little.

“My wife’s name, as you know, was Belle.” He started talking as if he were going to run out of time any minute. We thought that leaving Earth would give us all a new chance at living a good life together, until I ran into an old friend of mine, or what I thought was a friend anyway. It was only luck, or fate that had us run into each other during those last few minutes before the ship we were on blew up. I look back now and wonder if he thought that making good on a blood-debt, would clear his conscience. Back in the

Feudal Wars of a few years back, I had saved his life on the battlefield.” He must not have yet realized the time lapse, but I wasn’t going to correct him. “So I guess he decided to repay the favor. Some favor, huh. Give me four minutes to grab my family and escape a quick death, only to lose my wife and be stranded on a planet full of man-eating dinosaurs.” He started to weep. “Sorry, it’s still a little soon for the hurt to go away. Where was I? Oh yeah, it was this man I saved that destroyed the whole ship. If I had let him die, my wife, and the rest of those people on the ship would be alive right now. Over ten thousand lives are gone because I saved one life a few years ago. Now I have to live with that knowledge for the rest of my life, while trying to raise my daughter. I don’t know how I can live with that.”

“Damon, you can’t think of it like that. You have to realize that saving his life isn’t what made him destroy that ship. It sounds to me like he was going to destroy the ship because he wanted to. Secondly, if it hadn’t of been him, it would have probably have been someone else. Someone on our ship sabotaged our ship too; they just weren’t as successful at it. Third . . .” I lifted my hand with three fingers raised. “If you hadn’t of saved his life, and someone else had, you wouldn’t be here, alive, and able to raise your daughter.” Damon was looking around, as if seeing who could listen to our conversation while I continued. “You need to remember the good that your wife brought to your lives, and do your utmost best for your little girl. You first need to realize that it isn’t your fault that all those people are dead, it’s his. Then help your daughter understand that it isn’t her fault either,

maybe you should do those in reversed order, but don't tell her it's your fault, because it's not."

"I thank you Mr. Wagner, for helping me, and for watching over Michelle when she was out."

"It's no problem. That's what I'm here for, besides, Michelle is getting along well with my son Kyle so well, he doesn't want her to go home at night. He usually liked to play by himself before."

Some hours later, Damon came back over to talk again, and seemed to be a bit more relaxed.

"Mr. Wagner?"

"Please, call me Randy."

"Okay, Randy. It just occurred to me that I don't see many signs of advanced technology here. Is there a reason for that?" He asked.

"Yes, and your assessment is correct. We have some electricity from a couple micro hydro-electric plants, with a back-up system in place, but it is only enough to supply power for the lighting and a very few extras. Most of the extras are for the doctors, as I think you can understand. We do have some small arms weapons, melee weapons a few radios, and some bikes, but that is about all we were able to salvage from the ship before it started raining for weeks on end. Most of the folks that came here brought pots and pans, dishes, and some clothing. A few brought some tools, bibles and other books, a few games, and other odds and ends. We did salvage some computers and the add-ons, but we don't have the power for them yet. What would have been nice to save, would be some refrigeration and freezer units, but we didn't get that far, and again, the

limit with the power supply. What brought on this train of thought anyway?”

“I was just noticing some of your guys bringing in what looked like parts from my shuttle. That is where they are getting them from, isn’t it?”

“Yes, that’s right.” I smiled at him. “Your shuttle wasn’t repairable enough to get it off the ground, so I’ve got some people trying to make a land vehicle out of it. We can’t afford to waste anything usable here.”

“Sorry, I just had hopes of repairing that other engine and being able to fly it again someday.”

“If it makes you feel any better, we had the same hopes in mind.” I informed him.

“I do feel a little better, but it’s mostly because your people here are so understanding.”

“Actually, they’re not my people at all, though I may refer to them as such on occasion.”

“Yeah, then why do they call this place Randalville?”

“I don’t know how all that got started, but they are their own people. They can leave if they want to, I have no control, nor do I want it.” I felt kind of concerned about all of this, so switched the conversation. “As far as these people being understanding goes, some of these people have lost their entire families, and most have lost at least one family member. I have been lucky so far, and have adopted many who weren’t, but I’ve seen the pain and destruction ever since we landed here. I’ve been doing as much as possible to help others with their situations, hoping they will be better for it.”

Damon looked thoughtful for a moment before speaking again. “That does explain a lot about the people here, but

it doesn't explain why they name this place after you in particular."

"I'm not sure of the reasons myself. I did make the decision to bring my family, and several others in this direction, to live in a cave found by some of my friends that I've acquired since waking from stasis. It was also my idea to enlarge the cave, and in which direction, which led to the discovery of this cavern that we are living in. Maybe these are the reasons for the town being named after me."

"With all of that, and all the things I hear about you, I think I get the picture. By the way, these people really think of themselves as YOUR people." His last statement had me changing the subject yet again.

"So, how were things on Earth after Nov. 2nd 2035 anyway?"

"Nice going." Damon interjected. "You don't want to talk about your people anymore; I could see it on your face. Okay, I'll respect that. After the Nov. 2nd launch was successful, that wacko group started using rocket launchers, making the military push back the clear zone another mile, out of range of most of them. A few more ships made it just fine, which really pissed those idiots off, but they still managed to destroy enough of the ships to make getting on one very uncomfortable. Most of those that did make it were from that rich guy out west, who had started his own production line." I had heard of such a project being in the works before leaving, but was unaware that things had progressed so quickly, so listened with intent. "With the choices left us, die slowly, or a chance to live, or die quickly, many of us took our chances on the ships. We left

Jan 18th 2036, and things were starting to break down in all but a few nations worldwide. Countries were going to war with neighboring countries, some even using nuclear weapons. The Middle-east was a bloodbath, as was most of Africa. People in South America were moving to the mountains by the millions. Europe was in a panic, though not yet having any serious conflict, except for Germany and Poland of course.” He paused for a moment, a look of horror covering his once thoughtful looking facial features. He exhaled deeply before continuing. “You may not want to know about Asia.” There seemed to be a pleading here.

“Unfortunately, it is better to know all I can.”

“Okay then.” He shrugged his shoulders. “China went on a full scale attack in all directions, except for Japan. It seems like the Chinese were interested in obtaining as much land as possible from other nations. I can’t tell you how it went beyond the opening stages, as we left Earth shortly after it all started.”

I blinked. “From the look on your face, I expected something much worse than that.” I mentioned.

“Oh, it is much worse. The Chinese seemed to be the antagonists, but video from some Americans over there showed that the Chinese may have actually been saviors in many areas. Over most of Asia, not in Chinese control, there was mass slaughter of civilians by other militaries. Only the young females seemed to have any chance of survival, and only in the grimmest ways possible. Some of the scenes were so grotesque that they were only on the All Adult News Programming. The ways that bodies were used, tortured, and torn to pieces, made me think I was watching

what was left after animal attacks, when the feeding was done.”

It took a few moments for him to snap out of his memories, at which I took the time to pour both of us some water. He took a few sips before continuing yet again.

“At home, civil break-down was just starting in the South, while the North was full of people going underground in the hopes that they would live out their lives. I wish them all luck. That’s really all I can add during that time-frame.” He looked at me for another moment, then, as I was getting ready to thank him, he added. “After we came out of stasis, our Captain informed us that there was a colony settled on our original destination, but that we would make this planet our home, due to some sort of limitation with air and vegetation. The decision was probably helped along due to the radio frequency emitting a signal from your location, but just knowing that we aren’t alone in this solar system was something I figured you might like to know.”

“I thank you.” I told him. “It is good to know that there are others out there, even if they won’t be helping us. It’s also good to know that our radio signal is broadcasting far enough away to be noticed. Maybe we will have some company in the future.” At least I could hope so. That was when I noticed Loranda standing by the doorway watching us.

“Dinner is served, if you gents are hungry.” She announced. “We have flavoid soup with a mix of mil-rats and some grape flavored water to wash it down with.”

I knew that she would save the flavor packets from the mil-rats and use a few at a time to give us a treat when

she had enough of one flavor. Loranda was like that. For instance, our flavoid soup had oriental style vegetables in it as well as some tomato soup mix. It wasn't gourmet, but it was better than it could have been.

The younger children were already sitting at the table, Latisha helping her little brother Marcus while Elizabeth helped Loranda with the serving. I noticed that Elizabeth paid special attention to Damon, making it a point to sit next to him. Back on Earth, this would have been frowned upon, due to the age difference, but times had changed, and this wasn't Earth. I knew I would need to talk to Elizabeth about Damon's lack of interest later, and remind her that his loss was still too new.

After dinner, and saying good-night to Damon, I excused myself to go to work on an extra room I was trying to add at the back of our home. I would usually work on it for a couple of hours a night, except on what we had labeled the weekend, then spend time with the kids before going to bed. "Bed", now there was something I really missed, a nice, soft, comfortable bed. There were plenty of others wanting them too, but we could only do so much at a time, not many beds existed in our town. I would still sleep, even if it was on a stone floor, you learned to do things like that when necessary. Right now, I had had a long day, and tomorrow was the day to explore the third tunnel.

That night, as I lay on the floor with Loranda in my arms, I tried to imagine how to make a bed worth sleeping on, then closed my eyes and went to sleep.

Chapter 11

“DADDY, DADDY, CAN Michelle come over?” Kyle was asking, while trying to roll me over, waking me up.

“Kyle.” I started as I rubbed the sleep out of my eyes, trying to focus. “You know that’s up to your mom.”

“Nope, mommy tell me to ask you. Can she daddy, can she?”

“It’s okay with me, but not until you give your old dad a great big hug. I need your special strength today to help me in the tunnel.” I gave him a smile.

“Okay, I give great big hug.” He said, trying to reach his arms around my torso, before running in to tell Loranda all about it.

If I thought I was going to get by with only that, I was VERY wrong. In came Michael, Marcus, Kevin and Latisha, all working to get my attention. It was good to see Marcus and Latisha starting to snap out of their mourning, and

having fun. They had come a long way in a relatively short time, and I let them be children for as long as possible.

After breakfast I gathered my gear and left to gather the others that were going with me to the tunnel excursion, finding that many of them were already waiting for me. Only four of our number were later than I, but happened to be in sight, so I got on my bike and waited.

Within two minutes, we were heading down the tunnel with our lights on. All of us were expecting to travel about a mile and find a grill leading to the outside, but due to the ornamentation on the entrance, we had saved it until last. The idea was that if one tunnel would end up different, this should be it.

The tunnel did turn slightly, giving me the idea that maybe it would be the same after all, but it didn't end after a mile. After what seemed like three miles of riding, we came to an abrupt end of the tunnel, bringing us to a halt. Even with our lights, nobody could see anything beyond our immediate vicinity.

There was a feeling of enormity to the unknown space before us, what reminds me of impenetrable darkness, and this put me into a state of unease. This was made worse by a noise that was off in the distance, like something heavy walking around.

"Well guys." I whispered. "It looks like we had better turn back and rethink this one. Any objections?" I looked around, seeing no one raising their hand. I saw the looks on those closest to me, and could see the fear in those many eyes. We left there in a quiet hurry, peddling faster on the way back than I would have thought possible with the low amount of light at our disposal.

Once we arrived back in town, I had a work crew hurry and close off this tunnel, under the protection of several guards, then told all of those that went with me to think on this new development and meet again after lunch. I headed home myself, pondering what to do next.

* * *

Having not found a good, safe solution to our dilemma, we decided to just leave the third tunnel alone, and seal it up as good as possible for the time being. We spent the next few months in a sort of semi-peaceful pattern.

During this time, we did have a few marriages, some battles with a form of flu nearly killed several people, volunteers were asked for, for taking care of our piglets, as they had to be bottle fed for a while, and we added several puppies and kittens to our numbers.

Jessica, now eleven years old, was about to give birth, and other pregnancies were running rampant. New couples were sprouting like wildflowers in May, if back on Earth, and it started to become too apparent that we would have to look at our population soon, and figure out how to work things, with so many more females than males.

Elizabeth was now seventeen, and had finally given up on Damon, after he finally told her that he wasn't interested. This sent a wave of hurt feeling throughout our home for several days, but she finally got over it.

I estimate that we had been on this planet for a good eight months time, when all of a sudden, it finally stopped raining. No one even knew about it until a guard ran back

after his shift near the cave entrance, announcing it loudly to anyone in yelling distance, as he continued to excitedly jog around town, hollering. "It stopped raining, it stopped raining!"

The word swept through town like wildfire. After nearly five straight months of constant rain, it seemed all anyone could talk about.

At first, it seemed like a false hope, as it continued to rain off and on for another three days, and stayed overcast, but that fourth day started out bright and clear. Everyone wanted to bask in the sun, and would have, had not the danger been too great, so I came up with an idea. I asked several friends to help gather the town down below, and went to the up-stairs balcony to share this idea with them.

"Okay people." I started. "I know that many of you want to go enjoy the sunshine, I know I do. I also know that you realize the danger in doing so. Well, here's my idea. How about we all go in small bands to the ends of the two tunnels, and get your sunshine that way? You should be safe there, yet still have a chance to get some sunlight on your skin. Any objections?"

I didn't get the response that I had hoped for, but most seemed this was the safest way, considering the circumstances, and agreed to comply.

Loranda and I gathered the children, Elizabeth, and Cindy, the four of us older folks carrying torches, and walked to the end of the left tunnel. There was already another couple enjoying the sunshine when we arrived, so we waited patiently for our turn, Kevin deciding to sit on the floor near the front.

After a few minutes the couple left, so we went to take our turn, noticing that we had others heading our way behind us.

“Okay folks.” I said. “Let’s get a little sun before our time is up.”

Kevin got up, and the spot where he had sat glowed a bit, the mud wiping away on his clothes. Looking around, I noticed a faint glowing under the mud in a few of the footprints closest to the outside grill. I took off my shirt and wiped it against the grill in a couple of spots, noticing that those areas shined like the sun once cleaned.

“Dad?” Kevin looked at me with worry on his face. “Am I in trouble?”

“No son, I think you may have just accidentally solved a problem for us all. We just need to try something first. Everyone take off your shirts and start wiping away the mud and dirt from the grill, walls, and floor.”

Loranda looked at me before protesting. “I don’t think us females should be doing that.”

“Honey look, we have dealt with this already. Nobody needs to worry about showing their bodies, we all see each other at the pool for washing on a regular basis, and I need everyone to help here.”

“Alright, but you get to help with the laundry.”

“Fine, let’s get going on this for now, though.”

As we worked, the tunnel started lighting up like the outside world, and I could hear the excitement from the others coming toward us.

“Sorry everyone. I want you to go back to town and find some thick blankets, at least four of them. Then have Jake find some youngsters to use them to clean the tunnels,

starting at the outside ends, and everyone else is to wait for further instructions.”

I could see the disappointment on the others faces, but they did do as I asked; we just kept cleaning while we waited for the two young men with blankets to arrive.

When they showed up, so did Jake, with a puzzled expression on his face.

“What’s going on? How is all of this light possible?” His voice spoke volumes, not having the usual drawl to it.

“I’m not entirely sure.” I answered. “But it seems that the material this cave, tunnel, whatever, is made from, it seems to reflect the sunlight somehow. I’m not even sure that reflecting is the correct term, more like transferring of some sort.”

“How is that possible?” Jake asked.

“How the hell should I know, we were just going to see the sunlight like everyone else. If we weren’t the second group in here, someone else would have found this instead of us, I’m sure of it.”

“Brother finded it.” Kyle beamed, pointing at Kevin.

“He did, did he?” Jake smiled at Kyle.

“Yup! He finded the sun tunnel.”

Jake brought his attention back to me. “You know, if I pass the word around, we’d have these tunnels cleaned in no time at all. I’m sure most of the town would want this done as quickly as possible, giving everyone a good chance to get some sun and maybe even bring a little into the cavern as well.”

“You know Jake, I hadn’t yet thought that far ahead, but I’m sure you’re right. Why don’t you go get that started? We’ll just keep at it until we get tired.”

It took only a few hours to clean both tunnels, with so many wanting to help, and both tunnels did work the same way, bringing light all the way into the cavern.

I noticed that the offset tunnel entrances seemed to shine light onto some panel-like surfaces, at strange angles, and had them cleaned, then showing other panels to be cleaned, and on and on it went for the bulk of the day. There were even a couple of panels beaming light onto the third tunnel entrance, making me think we might actually have a way to learn what was at the other end of it, and the light lit up the entire cavern where we all lived.

“Ah-ha.” I thought. “The secret to the mystery of the lighting was now revealed. The torch holes must have been for night-time, and cloudy days.”

The sunlight seemed to make people much happier, and we took the next day and a half off, for a kind of holiday, except for those chores that just couldn’t be put off.

There was still plenty to do, and now that the water would start receding, it was only a matter of time before we would need to repair the palisade, and hopefully replant the garden with the seeds that had been so painstakingly gathered a few months before.

Adding some fresh meat would be high on our list, considering the speed with which we were going through our food supply. It would be a long time before we could start using any of the pigs for food, or we would never have any breeding stock. The only bulk food we could count on was the flavoids that had been found natively, and those had already run out quite a while back, not being able to go out and harvest during the rainy season. We were all

looking for a change in our diet from the mil-rats, that was for sure.

Something else on my mind was the third tunnel, and the question of what was on the other side of it. I was planning this, and other jobs to be done, when Jake came to my doorway.

“Mornin’ Randy.” He announced his presence. “I’ve been thinkin’ some ‘bout this here lighting works, and I begun ta think that we jist might be able ta grow our crops in here, and jist let nature grow them thar flaviods where it may. We could still try to grow some o’ the spuds outside as well since they’s underground anyhow. We ain’t usin’ that back wall area for housing, so why don’ we gate it off, wall up the side rail thare, bring in some soil, and move the pigs up thar, afore they get’s heavy ta lift?”

I could tell Jake was comfortable with the topic because of his grotesque use of the English language. “Well Jake, you’ve just made my job a lot easier. I’ll leave you in charge of doing that. Is there anyone in particular that you will need?”

“Yap. That there new feller Damon, and one or two o’ the ‘tritons. Purt near anyone can do ta rest whit me, Why do ya ask?”

“Do you mean the electricians?”

“Swhat I said, why?”

“I’m planning another trip down that third tunnel, and I’ve got some other things going on in my mind that also need attention, and Damon, being good at wood construction, is going to be needed to help design a stronger palisade for us. He might be working on both projects part-time, how much will you need him?” I asked.

“Oh, not very much.” He told me. “I jist need some pointers on some thangs, is all.”

“Alright Jake, I’ll let him know.”

“So tell me boss, whatcha think y’all might find there at the end o’ this here other tunnel?”

“Actually, I have no idea.”

“Awe right, well I’m agoin ta go ahead an’ git started. Ya let me know what y’all find.” Jake waved as he walked away.

It took me a few more minutes to finish my thoughts before I started rounding up those people I needed, and had them getting ready for the days work.

Once the tunnel entrance was cleared, I could see that this tunnel was indeed made of the same material, so I asked for two armed guards to stay in front of those that would be cleaning it. A person could easily see thirty or forty feet beyond the cleaned area, which made things easy enough for the guards to do some good.

In other areas that day, things went fairly well, and I was amazed at how much work was completed.

The palisade was going back up, and with input from Damon, it would withstand much more abuse than the one we had built before. He also helped Jake with the designs for the pig pens, and some tips to save time. Jake had others working on preparing the ground for seeding down below, leaving well planned pathways for walking.

Outside the palisade area there were others selectively cutting trees, to thin the density for vision purposes, yet still retaining the shading effect that would let the flavoids continue to grow close to us. We used all parts of the trees that

were cut. The logs were used for the palisade, the straighter branches were used for outlining the garden area and for supports, the less straight branches were used for the pig pens, and the rest was used for torches and firewood. When available, I had some woodworkers making what amounted to flower pots and trays that would be placed around the porches of the homes. These were to be used to grow more food producing plants, which would be easily accessible to those living there.

This amount of work took most of the available men and women in our town, leaving only a couple dozen for guard duty, cooking, and taking care of the young children. Most of the younger adults ended up doing labor jobs that there weren't enough others to do. The doctors, dentist and their few assistants were exempt from doing anything dangerous since they were specialists, and usually busy anyways.

Two hours into the next morning I received a welcome surprise. One of the cleaners from the third tunnel appeared at my doorway to let me know that the tunnel was completed, and that no unwelcome guests had shown up, or even been heard, during the time it had taken to clean it all. I was invited to come take a look. I had seven reserve guards get on bicycles with me, and we raced down the tunnel, covering the distance in about fifteen minutes.

There was enough light reflecting off of the tunnel to illuminate, though dimly, part of a vast area that was much larger than what we now lived in. Even with only dim lighting off in the distance, we could see the outlines of some sort of buildings, and one face of what could only be a pyramid.

The sight was breathtaking, to say the least, with the area in here easily possible of containing a small city. Then, something else caught my attention and got me excited. The smell of water, and fresh air. It seemed that this cavern must have its own ventilation, as we had closed off the tunnel from our little town for several months, and we had cut through the rock of a cave to find the cavern we lived in before that. As I pondered this, I noticed that there seemed to be a wall of sorts in front of the buildings, after the vast areas in front of it.

The excitement was growing within as I thought of the possibilities that may lie before us, and I wanted to just do everything at once.

I politely asked for a dust mop from one of the cleaners, and started to sweep my way down what looked for the life of me, like a road. This too was made of the same energy transferring material, and I just couldn't help feeling like a pioneer on an adventure. With me leading the way, it didn't take much to get the other cleaners working beside me, brightening the area around us a bit at a time, the guards running in front of us, and to the sides, to keep us as safe as possible. Two of the guards had to stay at the tunnel entrance for security reasons, though we saw no signs of the necessity of it.

Not having walls and ceiling to worry about, it took much less time to clear the entirety of the approximately half mile road to the wall that we had seen earlier. The road came to a gate, but luckily it was open, the wall would have been a terrible climb.

There was no roadway along the wall, as the soil went up to the wall itself, but I just had to try something. I had a

hunch and tried to clean part of the wall, and found that it too was indeed reflective, so I started cleaning the wall on the outside. I was working to increase the amount of light in here as much as possible, and only stopped long enough to talk to Jim Adams. He had been in charge of the cleaning detail, and I now asked him to get another thirty people in here, and sent him into town on a bike.

I just couldn't help myself, I just had to be there cleaning the wall of this place, even though we started to get less in the way of lighting results as we moved down the wall, away from the light of the tunnel. This was a new challenge for me, I couldn't figure out why the transfer material wasn't working like before, so I figured that it must lose its intensity after a certain distance, or constantly, but we just hadn't noticed it before. Still, it was better than torches.

We had been progressing in both directions for hours now, and I could finally see the outline of the corner of this side of the wall. The light was getting very dim in the way of results now, but after what had to be a good mile, it was to be expected from the earlier results. Jim was saying the same about his side after he came back with the four workers he could round up and bring with him. The height of the wall had to be twenty eight to thirty feet easily, and we could only reach about twelve of those feet for cleaning, we'd have to come up with another plan for the top portion later.

As I worked to the corner of the wall, I accidentally kicked something on the ground, nearly falling from a lack of balance. It was fairly dark here, so I used my flashlight, and found myself staring into the face of a huge predator.

Chapter 12

THANK GOD THIS predator was long dead, and I had only tripped on the skeletal remains of its head. If it had been alive, I'd have been eaten right then and there, I'm sure of it.

It looked like the remains of a T-rex, but I couldn't be sure in this lack of light, and didn't stick around to look any closer, if one of these things had made it in here, then so could another.

I walked quickly back to the middle of the wall, gathering those on my side as I went, and telling them to be quiet, very quiet. With the first cleaner I notified to follow me, I handed him my dust mop, bringing my rifle up in both hands, and taking off the safety. I received the same worried looks from everyone who saw my actions, including some of those on the other side. The guards noticed my actions immediately, and also became more alert, using hand signals to warn the others at the far end

of the other side of the wall, all of them and the workers hurrying to the central location.

Within fifteen minutes of my tripping, everyone was gathered at the gate and I led them inside. Finding a stairway to the top of the wall was simple enough, so that's where I led them. It was only then that I informed them on what I had found, not leaving anything out. Some were obviously scared, but not all believed that just because one had found its way in before, that that meant another would follow, even though all agreed that the possibility was there.

"Maybe the entrance it used is now closed." Was one argument, and valid too.

"Why haven't we seen anything alive in here?" was a good question brought forth.

"I would worry more had you of told me that you found a freshly dead dinosaur." Came another comment.

"Okay, okay, I just wanted everyone to know the possibilities before asking you all to make the decision to quit, or continue. I won't make anyone keep working here if they don't want to. Anybody want to go back to town?" Nobody raised a hand, or said anything. "Then I propose that we at least continue down the road, toward the pyramid, at least that may actually give enough light to see by. What do you think?"

There seemed to be a lot of agreement amongst those here, so our direction was decided.

This time I hung back, thinking about who must have lived here before, and why they weren't here anymore. What could have happened to them?

I looked around at the nearest buildings, seeing for the first time that they were similar to middle-eastern architecture.

Very utilitarian in design, with some sort of symbols etched into the sides near the doorways, at least on those I could see from my vantage point. I could see no color variations; they all seemed to be made of the same light gray stone that was prevalent in this area. All the buildings were single story, with the obvious exceptions of the pyramid, walls, and the gatehouses which were most likely used for the guards.

Jim snapped me out of my reverie. "Hey Randal."

"Yes."

"We are going to get to the pyramid before our work-day is over. Do you want us to start on the pyramid itself when we get to it?"

"Yes, that's fine, but I also want someone going around cleaning the panels that are located on the tops of the homes in the direct line of the road."

"I had noticed some of those earlier, but wasn't sure if they would help any, so I kept it to myself." He looked cautious.

"I don't know if they will help either, but we may as well try." My statement eased his mind some. "Are we sure that the pyramid is made of the same material as the tunnel and road?" I asked.

"Yes, it has already been confirmed that it is the same, though it gives off no light at the moment. We haven't cleaned that far yet."

"Alright, thank you for the info. Anything else?"

"I just thought you might like to know that the road to the pyramid is about three times as long from the gate to the pyramid, as it is to the tunnel entrance. Close to a mile and a half I'd say."

“Thank you Jim.”

“No problem.”

By the time our day was over, the cleaning crew had spent an hour working on the pyramid, after the road and panels were finished.

Now that the possibility of trouble had presented itself, I asked some people to block most of the entrance to the third tunnel at night, making it easier for the two guards to watch over. With the new watch area, it was time to set up a new watch rotation, that would require double the guards as before.

I had just finished breakfast the next morning, once again flavoid soup, when Jake appeared at my doorstep.

“Hey Randy, how ya doing t’day?”

“I guess I’m okay. Why? What’s on your mind?”

“I’ve been a wonderin’ about that thar city ya found, an’ it seems ta me that thar must be some right bad reasonin’ fo folks ta jist up an’ leave a place like that. I don’ like it, none.”

“I’ve been doing some wondering myself, but I just can’t see that we have a lot of choices.” Now I was getting more worried than before. It had been just my imagination, now it was Jake saying the same thing, yet, we could sure use the expansion room in the future, as long as we could make it safe. “If that place is better than this, then we need to utilize it, we can’t just stay here forever.”

“I suppose you’re right. Just be careful out there.” With him speaking correctly, I could tell he wasn’t happy about the idea. Looking around, he went back into his southernish drawl. “I meant ta tell ya last night, we finished ta pens an’

moved all ta pigs up thar. Heck, we even have most o' da crops planted. We's should oughta be finished 'round lunch t'day. I could send 'bout ten mo' workers your way at that time, purt near twenty tomorrow."

"I appreciate it Jake, but let's have them finish the palisade first, then we can focus on the city. By the way, how is Sylvia doing? I hear she had a fall yesterday, and opened her arm on the landing."

"She in some pain, that fo' certain, but she be awe right in a week or two. How'd ya like that Raptor last night? I plumb ate me too much. Whew, it had been a while since we had a good meal."

"I had some, but only because Loranda saved me a plate, remember how late we were, getting back last night?"

"Yeah, sorry, I nearly forgot that part." He sheepishly looked down at the floor. "What do you plan on doing in there today, if you don't mind my changing the subject?"

"I don't mind." I could tell he felt uncomfortable. "We started cleaning the reflective surface of the pyramid yesterday, and today we will work on it some more. Honestly, I think it will take a few days to complete the one side of it."

"I sho' wished we coulda saved more o' them people from ta ship Randy, we's got all kind of room, an' nowheres near 'nough folks."

"Don't forget the limited food supplies. How long would we last with, let's say, twice the population?"

"I ain't sure 'bout all o that, it jist seems that we could use some mo' people in here."

"It could still end up that way in the future. I'm sure there must be other ships on their way here right now." I reminded him.

“I ‘apose you right. I hope it ain’t much longer befo’ we see’s one git here. It’s jist not ta same when you knows that you be one one-thousandth o’ the human pop’lation on da planet. Especial’ when they’s so many critters out there that jist want ta eat ya, and they’s jist too many woman folks in da pop’lation we do have.”

“Well, you’re right about that, and we’re going to have to have a meeting about that topic real soon, too.”

“Don’ sees what good it’s to do. Well, I knows you got yo’ plate full . . . , I mean, a lot to do, so I’ll see you later.” He left, looking like he was choking on his own words, walking as fast as he could.

I couldn’t begrudge his feelings, as mine weren’t far from the same. I also realized that we had been real lucky so far, to be alive at all.

* * *

“Well, what do you think?” Damon asked me as I was looking at the new palisade. It had taken two additional days of hard work, with the help of those helpers released by James when their work was done in the cavern.

“It seems like it is built better this time, and I like the covered watch posts. It will definitely be better for the guards, and might keep them from getting as many colds, too.” Those working on this project were able to reuse some of the timber from the previous palisade, saving additional time.

“Do you want us to replace the other side, too?” He was asking me. “Or just this side here?” He referred to the older

palisade that had surrounded the second cave entrance, and matched up to the positioning of the first.

“I believe that we had best leave well enough alone for now. We have immediate need of your work parties, but we may worry about it in the future.”

Damon and I used the new steps to climb to the rampart, as I wanted to see what view the guards would have from their posts. It was obvious that the harvesting of timber was thought out before cutting started. There was still ample shade for flavoids to grow wildly, you could see much further than before, and those trees cut, were done so nearest the new palisade side, leaving the thicker growth nearest the side we would wait to refurbish.

I was pointing out some future ideas to Damon when something shiny in the sky caught my eye. At first, it seemed to be one of those flying dinosaurs, a Pterodactyl, of some sort, but they wouldn't be shiny. No, this must be man-made. It must be . . .

“A ship!” Two of the workers called out at the same time, as I was grasping what I saw.

I couldn't believe it, Jake and I were just talking about this a few days ago, and now one was coming here very close to us.

“Hey, what's wrong with it?” One of those that first called out asked.

As I watched this ship coming out of the sky, I could tell that there was little, if no control of the flight pattern. I briefly wondered if our ship had looked the same before we crashed, and all hell broke loose. That huge metal container looked like a small box falling from the sky, being pushed by some invisible force in a forward motion as it descended.

It didn't seem to move very fast, but I realized that looks can be deceiving, especially from that far off. They should have slowed considerably if the landing was to be safe. No such luck, they were definitely coming in too fast, and now that they were getting closer, all of us could see they were going to crash. For whatever reason, they had their landing gear down, not that it would do much good.

When it was all too clear that they had only seconds left, their reverse thrusters finally came on, slowing them down some. I fear it is a case of too little, too late.

I wonder how many survived. Hell, I wonder how many will have wanted to survive once they find this place out!

* * *

"Damon!" I exclaimed. "I need you to get Bill Sanders, Daniel McGuire, Cal Jacobs, and Kazak Haquinn, to get there guard detachments ready for immediate travel. We've got to see if anyone survived that landing, and it's got to be done NOW. I'll take Dave's group, these work parties, and head out before you. Make sure you also obtain four more work parties to go with you. If nothing else, maybe we can recover some necessary supplies." I un-shouldered my rifle, waved those that were to go with me to follow, and we started toward what I was sure was going to be a wreck.

This was much more important than our other projects, and the word spread quickly throughout the town while everyone was organized.

Before I could get ten steps from the palisade, Jake hailed me to stop for a second, and ran to me.

“I know you’re in a hurry, but I just had to ask you to try to bring me any seed from that other ship, if you can find any. Even the addition of one or two new kinds of seed would help our diet, and maybe make things more palatable.” No southern drawl used this time.

“I’ll do what I can Jake, but I can’t make any promises.” I paused for only a brief second. “You know, I find it funny that your grammar gets better when you’re excited. It makes me realize how much effort you put into that hillbilly accent. Anymore questions before I go?”

“No, that’s it. Be careful out there, and good luck to you. Really, I hope you don’t need it.”

“Thank you Jake, now we really must get moving, peoples lives could be at stake.”

* * *

We were on the move. I had the shuttle, which had been improvised as an armored vehicle, with those guards that had been outside at the sighting. Behind us would be the bulk of our guards and workers, along with our remaining handmade vehicle, lovingly called a battle-bug.

Our small group had one 25mm, two .50cal sniper rifles, and one M-60 machine gun. The rest of our weapons were the M-16’s, two H&K 93’s, and various handguns. My M-16 was the only one in the group that was equipped with an M-203 grenade launcher, and a couple over-unders with 12 gauge shotguns rounded out our heavy section. We did have a radio that had been installed in the shuttle, so we could at least stay in touch with our home base.

As we approached our old ship, we ran into trouble. A pair of allosaurus' was going in the direction of the new ship, until we were spotted, which turned them in our direction.

"Stop now!" I yelled. "25 on the roof, take them down." I may as well have held my breath, Kazak was already taking aim.

When turning the shuttle into a sort of tank, it had been redesigned to let someone stand up, place a weapon on the roof, and fire in the forward arc. The same was done for the rear, allowing two shooters simultaneously.

Red Foster, one of those we had saved from our ship on the rescue run, had a .50cal, acted as our rear guard.

Kazak wasted no time before firing, removing the head of the first allosaurus. The second wasn't so easy. Having moved just as Kazak had pulled the trigger; the other allosaurus had been missed, and was now getting too close for comfort. Several of us had our rifles up, firing, but it didn't seem to do more than piss it off, and it was a third round from Kazak that finally brought it down, severing its long neck close to the main body. We could see the mouth still moving on the head that was now lying on the ground, one eye staring hard at us, open, but not seeing. It sent chills down my spine all the same.

"Clip?" I heard Kazak ask, jolting me back to reality. He was handed a new one, which he quickly exchanged for the empty.

It was only a matter of minutes to arrive at the end of the clearing that had been made by the ships crew, before they were killed. Once there, we had to leave the shuttle behind, the terrain was bad enough, but the thick forestation made it

impossible to take the vehicle any further. I called base and let them know our status, before we continued.

We knew the approximate location of the landing sight, walking in that direction, eventually running into a path of sorts left by the ship when hitting the ground. Looking to the right, we could see the massive ship, and some of the lower portions of the outside covering that had once been attached to it. The ship almost looked intact, but not quite, it had sustained more damage than I had hoped, though still a lot less than ours had, which left me hopeful for the people inside.

We approached briskly, our hopes of more humanity driving us on, until we walked around the tail-section of the craft, seeing part of those who had made it so far, being ripped apart by a flock of raptors.

“Kazak, switch ammo.” I whispered, handing him a new magazine with SR ammo. “The rest of you, start picking ‘em and dropping ‘em.”

It only took about one minute to take out four of them, the fifth running away, but it was long enough for several more of those folks to be injured and killed.

We approached the ships outside elevator with speed and caution, afraid of another attack, and needing to save those we could. The scene was horrific. There were a good forty or more people on the ground, dead and dying, only six were still standing, obviously in a state of shock, a haunted look in their eyes. Of those on the ground, it appeared that only two or three would possibly live to see another day, what a waste.

“Who’s in charge here?” I asked.

One of the six still standing looked as if shocked with a cattle-prod. "I, I, I guess I am, n, now. That man there was the captain." He pointed to a hunk of meat that vaguely resembled a human torso, with one leg still attached.

"We need to get off the ground now." I told him, and started toward the elevator, dragging him with me. Some of those with me picked up the wounded with a chance at survival, and led the other unhurt to the elevator.

"What about the others?" The first man asked.

"We can't waste time on them." I informed him.

"But some of them are still alive."

"None of those we are leaving behind are going to make it past the next few minutes, they're already dead, their hearts just don't know it yet. We don't have the time to do anymore than get off the ground. Now, let's go." We still had a good twenty minutes before the rest of our people would be here, so we decided to use the time wisely.

"Well, I'm Randal Wagner. You would be?"

"Sorry, I'm Samuel Knolls, XO of this ship" He hesitated for a second. "CO now, I guess."

"Well Mr. Knolls, can you explain what happened here?" I asked.

"Yeah, we went down the elevator, and . . ."

"Not that." I interrupted him. "I'm talking about what happened to your ship."

"Oh, I'm sorry. There was a couple that tried to shut-down the whole ship. Can you believe it? They wanted to kill us all, almost succeeded too." He started. "We thought they were just another couple wanting to start over, but we found them in areas off limits as we were nearing the planet. The

woman destroyed our communication equipment, and part of our propulsion system. The man was trying to shut down our navigation control ability, after dismantling our force field. We were lucky enough to stop them, and get the force field back on-line before entering a shower of meteorites, but we weren't able to get full use of navigation or propulsion back, causing a hard landing. The co-pilot saw a reflection off that ship over there." He pointed toward our crashed ship. "So we tried to land next to it."

"How many people made it?" I asked.

"We lost seventy eight people, until these monsters outside started in on us. Why?"

"The ship before you only had two survivors, and our ship was sabotaged in fashion similar to yours, but there are only about a thousand of us left from it."

"A thousand? Where are the rest?"

"About half were killed in the crash, the rest were killed as your captain was. This whole planet is crawling with dinosaurs, and from multiple time periods too. Didn't your sensors pick them up?" I asked.

"No, our sensors were out of commission too. No telling who did that, but we have both of the culprits in the ship's brig."

"Good, I know just the punishment for them." I said.

"Shouldn't that be my decision?" He asked me, a little nervously.

"Look, we aren't back on Earth anymore. Things here are much different." I tried explaining to him. "Here, it's survival of the fittest, and even then it's only if they are lucky, too."

All of a sudden, his whole demeanor changed from one of confusion, to one of hostility. "I'm still in charge of this ship, its crew, and the people on board it!"

With his change of attitude, I started to get upset. Was he going to try becoming lord of those who came here on this vessel? "I'll tell you what." I stared at him with mirth. "You stay here and be in charge all you want, but you'll end up in charge of an empty command, and a ship full of dead bodies. I don't have the time for a pissing contest with you. We'll just leave you and your ship full of snacks alone, and you can fend for yourselves." I turned my back to him, and motioned for my group to head back to the elevator.

"Hold on a minute Wagner." He cut in sharply. "You can't just leave her, and take off. You're supposed to . . ."

"To what?" I cut him off. "Stay here and throw away the lives of those who really want to survive. It won't do any good, you will still end up dead, but then my people won't have protection either. Forget it. Either you do as I say now, or we leave, it's not debatable. Make your decision now, or we're gone."

"All right, I'll do what you say for now, but things may change in the future."

"I'm very sure they will." I told him in return. "But for now, let's try saving these peoples lives."

I could tell that the two of us would butt heads again very soon, but for now, he did as I told him.

The first thing is weapons and ammo. I want all of it emptied from the armories and brought to the ships entrance." I looked him in the eyes. "And I do mean everything. Next, seeds for crops, and any animals brought from Earth. The

pet's can be with their families. I want both forklifts to haul pallets of ammo, so it will be up to the people to carry cases of mil-rats on our little nature walk. Those with children too small to walk will have to carry them, no cases required. Personal belongings will have to wait for now, except those families with infants, they may bring the infant's things with them. I want every pallet jack you have, loaded with food supplies. When everyone is out, and all is as I said, we will get moving. You have four hours to get ready, so get going."

Our other people were already showing up by the time I was having this conversation. I had our work crews help with the armories, bringing up cases of ammo, and weapons. This was by far the most important non-living necessity aboard the ship, as it would make protecting ourselves much more possible.

The ships armories more than doubled our firepower, but those items that helped most were the heavy weapons. They consisted of an additional four 25mm AT rifles, eight .50cal sniper rifles, and a pair of .50 cal machine guns w/tripod stands. These babies were worth the trip by themselves. The machine guns came with an entire pallet of belted ammo, and I made sure a forklift brought that on the first trip. The other first trip pallet consisted of the ammo for the 25mm AT rifles, the .50cal rifles, and the grenades for the M-203s.

There were six pallet jacks in all. I had four bring more ammo, one was for crop supplies, and the last was saved for a pallet of medical supplies, which we were running low on in town.

Inside were fifty bicycles that would come with us on the first trip, and an experimental solar truck that I dearly

wanted, but that would have to wait until a road could be cut through to the other ships trail. The forklifts and pallet jacks would have enough of a time trying to get through the vegetation, and they were much narrower, needing to go around trees in some areas.

I found some of this ship's personnel, and passengers were already proficient with firearms, so enlisted them as guards to add to those we already had. I also had my work crews pick up weapons, and add to our guards. The two machine guns would be carried to the two vehicles, and placed on the forward facing top of the structures. I sent the battle bug with the first of those to leave, and had sentries staggered along the entire route, always within easy line of sight, to protect the other people on their way to the cavern. The two dead predators were in plain view to all as they passed the area where we had killed them, giving all a small dose of reality. They needed to know the dangers of this place, and they needed to learn it quickly.

During the time it took to move everyone to the cavern, there were two more instances of danger. The first was a small family of Triceratops, of which we killed two, turning the rest around, they would become food. The second was another pack of raptors, which killed one of the new guards from the ship, and a little boy who panicked, running right in front of two of them. All four of the raptors were killed, but it was too late for the boy and the guard.

We recovered the bodies of the raptors, and the unfortunate victims. The former were cooked for dinner, the latter were buried with services.

* * *

Where we used to have more room than we thought we could fill for generations, we now had nowhere near enough space at all. There were people staying in the tunnels to both sides, staying on whatever ground wasn't planted for crops, up on the walkways, in the homes of those that had extra rooms, and anywhere else we could squeeze a place to sleep.

I knew that we would have to consider the city within a day or two, but had to get supplies before concentrating on making a vast area safe. I was running against the clock and I knew it.

With agonizing hesitation, we did open the tunnel to the city for room, but only after stationing guards I knew I could trust at the far end, and having the tunnel sealed off with enough supplies to clog the last ten feet before the opening.

The next morning started with Triceratops soup/stew for breakfast, it was then time to start a new day of work. There was so much to do that I wasn't able to make all three trips to the ship myself, managing only one.

The only encounter that day was a herd of Brontosaurus like beasts that I was told were actually Shunosaurus, which has a spiky, bony club at the end of it's tail, and is a much smaller, huge dinosaur (only around 30-35 feet long, only?), from the Jurassic period, normally found in China and its surrounding area.

Some of the nice finds of the day were refrigeration and freezer units, and four more micro-hydro plants.

Much of the personal baggage, and boxes, were brought in on this day, crowding us even further, and much more of the prepackaged food arrived during the day.

On the morning of the third day with the new ship, I planned to take about half of our guards, all of the portable lighting, and a large cleaning crew to the city to get things ready for a mass move, once things were safe. As I was getting ready, Mr. Knolls appeared at my doorway.

“Wagner? I know that we should be thanking you for bringing us here, but the truth is, this place just isn’t big enough for us all. We need more room. I’m thinking about taking some of these people back to the ship, until you can add sufficient room for them.”

“All right Knolls.”

“That’s Mr. Knolls, thank you.” He interrupted.

“Just like you call me Mr. Wagner, right?” I questioned.

“I happen to hold the rank of Lieutenant-Commander in the U.S. Space Services.” He tried pointing out to me.

“Yes well, there is no longer a U.S., and you are no longer in space. Your ship is abandoned and you are now no more special than anyone else here.”

“Then what makes you so special?” He asked snidely as Jake walked up.

“I’ll tell you.” Jake couldn’t help himself; he was getting real tired of Samuel Knolls already. “He’s the one that saved our asses, and made it possible to survive here. He’s also the one who has become the leader of us, due to respect that he has given, and earned in return. I suggest that if you don’t like it, you just haul your ashes out of here. You keep being

a jerk to him, and they's likely to be our first hanging in here!"

"How dare you threaten me, do you know who you're talking to?" Knolls asked.

"Yeah, the sum bitch I'm about to pound into the ground with these here fists of mine."

I had never seen Jake so mad in all the time I had known him, and was afraid he was really going to kill Knolls then and there.

"That's enough guys." I stated. Knolls, you might want to be quiet for now. I'm afraid you will get hurt if you don't." I looked at Jake, hoping he would calm down enough to keep his hands to himself. "Now Jake, what's on your mind, besides MR. Knolls here?"

"I think you mean Mr. Candy-ass, don't you?" Mr. Knolls backed up a couple of steps away from Jake. "I was meaning to tell you that this punk's ship was carrying eleven crops that we didn't have, well, seed for them anyway. With the addition of the goats, we can now give fresh milk to the babies that lost their mothers."

"How many motherless babies do you have here?" Asked Knolls.

"Three." I told him. "And we've been saving all the powdered milk of any flavor for them, from the mil-rats, to keep them alive." I again focused my attention to Jake. "I was thinking along the same lines, and breeding them now would likely help the situation."

"I'm on it boss, and if'n you need me to learn this weak-wrist a thang or three, y'all just a holler."

“Will do Jake; now go run along before I tell your wife that you’re dawdlin’.”

“Tell me you wouldn’t do no such a thang, she’s purt near the onliest one I’m afeared of.” Jake turned and left, laughing.

When Jake was out of ear-shot, Knolls stated. “That uneducated hillbilly doesn’t seem to like me.”

“Well, you do tend to rub the wrong side of the tree. As far as education goes, I happen to know that he has an A.S. Degree in economics, and a P.H.D. in Agribusiness, so I think you’re making improper assumptions. He talks like that because he wants to. Now, back to your first dilemma. If you will go with my group today, I think I can put your mind at ease about the problem of too little room.”

“All right, this I’ve got to see.”

I grabbed my weapons and equipment, kissed Loranda good-bye, and led Knolls out into what had become an overcrowded town.

Nearly four hundred of us walked around those refugees parked in the tunnel to the city. When we arrived at the end, I asked if there had been any problems.

“No real problems, but we have heard some sounds that were disconcerting once in a while.” One of the guards told me.

“What kind of noises were they?” I wasn’t happy about this.

“Rhythmic drum beats and distant roars of some sort, why?”

I knew that this guard would know that the “drum beats” were really large animal foot-falls, so I figured that he didn’t want to scare anyone with the truth, until knowing it was okay to do so.

“We’ll be leaving the cleaning crews in the tunnel for now. I only want the guard sections out with Mr. Knolls and me. I need to show him something.”

“What are you planning to show me?” Knolls asked.

“You really don’t know?” I asked. Not understanding how he hadn’t yet heard of the city. “The news has been all over town for several days.”

Knolls looked at me with a strange expression on his face, one I couldn’t read, before continuing. “I’ve heard everything from Martians landing tomorrow, to huge civilizations living amongst us, that we just can’t see. I don’t put a lot of stock in what I hear.”

Instead of telling him about the city, I figured it best to let him see it for himself. “Alright, but when we go out through this entrance, you need to be very quiet, at least until we know what to expect.”

“Yeah, okay.” He agreed. I just wish he had sounded more sincere. “But you had better not be trying to trick me, I’ll be watching you.”

“You know, if I hadn’t been stupid enough to ask you to accompany me here today, I’d be tempted to do what Jake talked about earlier.”

“What? Have him pound me?”

“No, I’d do it myself, now please be quiet.”

“Not very friendly, are you?”

“I am to my friends, and those I respect, now shut up.”

By this time the guards had quietly removed enough of the barricade to let us exit. The first sixty guards had brought bikes along, while Knolls and I were on foot.

“Why is it we are walking, instead of riding bikes?” Knolls again started talking.

“Because you look like you can use the exercise.”

“But wouldn’t it be faster to ride to wherever we’re going?” He dismissed my insult. “You’re supposed to be in charge here, right?”

“Look, just because I’m in charge of these people, doesn’t mean I should lord it over them when it’s unnecessary. You should really reevaluate who you are, and what you want people to think about you.”

“Yeah but . . .”

“But nothing.” I cut him off quickly. “You need to learn that your shit stinks like everyone else’s. You’re no better than those that came here with you, probably not nearly as good as most of them, yet you seem to think that they will follow you because you happen to have been in charge for a few minutes.”

“What do you mean, a few minutes?”

“I mean that you were in charge from the time your captain died, until the time you made the decision to live. After that, I was in charge, and I still am.”

“Not for long, you’re not.”

“We’ll just have to wait and see now, won’t we?” I asked him, not expecting an answer, or maybe I was. Either way, it didn’t come out and I brought him around the last of the partial barricade.

“I don’t believe my eyes.” Knolls stated. “Is that what I think it is?”

“Yes, it is. An entire city, vacant, and waiting for residents to fill it up.” I could see the look of desire on Knolls’ face.

“Why aren’t we already in here?” He finally asked a question without sarcasm in his voice.

“We don’t yet know if it is safe to live here, that’s why.”

“If it’s empty, then how can it be dangerous?”

I waved to a couple of the closest guards to come over. “We need to borrow your bikes for a bit.”

Both men were okay with it, as I figured they would be, and handed them over. I then looked at Knolls, waving for him to take one of the bikes, and mounted the bike I was going to use.

“Come with me, and for Pete’s sake, be quiet.”

He followed me to the area next to the corner, where I motioned for him to get off of the bike, and to stay quiet. “Why should I have to get off of the bike?” He asked loudly, sarcasm dripping from his voice.

I walked up close to him and whispered. “Outside, if you did something like that, you’d be dead, now do as I say.”

“But you didn’t say anything. You just wiggled your hand at me.” He again used a louder than usual voice. Then I heard it, that oh so dreadful sound, not far in the distance.

“Boom, boom, boom, boom.”

“What was that?” Knolls asked, a hint of worry in his voice.

“If you want to live . . .” I said as I was getting back onto the bike. “Ride, and don’t look back.” I was already pedaling, gaining speed. That’s when I heard the unmistakable roar from a T-rex, or other like creature. I fired one shot into

the air from one of the Uzi's, to warn those waiting, of the danger, then concentrated on riding as fast as I could.

"Boom, boom, boom, boom."

From out of nowhere, Knolls passed me like a man possessed, pulling away from me, as I continued to put every ounce of speed I had into riding that bike.

"Boom, boom, boom, boom." The T-rex was gaining on me. Though I still had a good lead, I was losing this race, and still had far too much distance to travel, to reach safety.

"Boom, boom, boom, boom, roar." I could now see the guards working into shooting positions, yet was nowhere near enough to escape the impending doom hanging over me. T-rex was getting much closer to me, his foot-falls were getting much louder, and I could feel them under the bike.

"Boom, boom, boom, boom." I knew I was going to die; rex was closing on me so fast that I imagined I could feel his breath on the back of my neck. It was so real, no, it was real. I really could feel his breath on the back of my neck. On the back of my neck, and on my back, my head, and I could hear the thing breathing.

I saw a guard wave me to my right, and instantly angled that way.

"Boom, boom, boom, boom, roar." Okay, this was it. I couldn't be more than a foot in front of rex's mouth. I turned to the right some more, hunching my head down, when "CRACK"; I heard the beautiful sound of a 25mm being fired. "WHUMP". There was the sound of a small explosion. Searing pain hit me, then I felt the ground

shake, something hitting the back tire of the bike, crushing it instantly as I flew over the handlebars, banging both knees on the way. I was flying through the air, my back still burning, and then . . .

Chapter 13

“NOTHING . . . OR
WAS THERE

something?”

“A small point of light, way out there, off in the distance. A warm, bright light, wanting me to come to it. Why would a light want me to go to it, when I was sooo far away? Oh well, I had nothing better to do. Besides, everything else was black, and I can’t see through black, can I? I wonder where I am right now. I don’t even remember who I am, or why I’m here. Come to think of it, where is here anyway. How long have I been here, it seems like forever, I think.”

“Randal.”

“Where did that voice come from? Who’s Randal? Could that be who I am? The voice is sure pretty sounding, I wonder if the voice and the light are one and the same. Maybe I’ll find out some other time, right now I’m just too tired to get any closer.”

“Randal.”

“Wow, there’s that voice again. I wonder if I’ve heard it somewhere else.”

“Daddy.”

“That voice is also familiar. Oh, there’s that spot of light again, but who am I? Could I be this Randal person? Or maybe I’m this daddy person. Maybe I’m neither one of them, but I do like the light. I wonder if I can reach it this time, it would sure be nice to be able to reach it. That light has evaded me so many times, and yet I simply must keep trying to reach it. Hey, that’s a little better; I actually got a little closer this time. I wonder how I did that. Concentrate, that’s what I need to do. I have to bring myself closer to the light. It’s so warm and comforting, just like the voices I hear.”

* * *

“I haven’t heard the voices in a while, but that happens often. The light though, the light is almost always there, but just out of reach. I want the light so bad, how can I reach it? That’s right, I must concentrate some more. There we go, now it’s much closer. Hey, that looks like a rectangle beyond the light, no; the light is in the rectangle. Maybe I can see more if I can just . . .”

“Arghhh . . .”

My god, what’s this pain I’ve got in my neck? It feels like I was hit by a semi-truck. Wait a minute; I’m strapped to a bed of some sort. Oh my head hurts.

* * *

“Well, Randal. Nice to see you back amongst the living.”
A voice I recognized informed me.

“Doctor Takahashi?” Was my first question.

“Yes Randy, it is I. You had us all worried that you might never come back to us.”

“What do you mean? How did I get here? What happened?”

“Whoa. One question at a time Mr. Wagner, please. What I mean is that you took a nasty fall, and the white phosphorous that hit you didn’t help either. Lucky for you, you had your rifle across your back. Otherwise I couldn’t talk to you right now.”

“A nasty fall? Fall from where?” Then, all of a sudden I had a rush of memories hit me. The T-rex, the bicycle, Knolls. “The bike! I fell from the bike, didn’t I?”

“Yes, you did, and you landed on your head as well, cracking two vertebrae in your neck. I’m sorry, but I had to operate on your neck, and immobilize it for you. You will live, but I’m unsure if you will ever have full movement of it again.”

“And my back?” I asked.

“I had to remove part your skin, to remove the W.P. from your back. You were much luckier than I would have thought possible here, as It wasn’t too deep. This is what I was saying about your rifle, it took the brunt of the damage there. I did have to patch you up by using skin grafts from your thighs. The good new here is that your skin healed

very well, long ago. The neck surgery was the scary part, it wasn't an easy process with my limited equipment."

"Long ago? How long have I been here?"

"It has been more than three months now, Earth time."

"Three months, how can that be?"

"You were nearly dead when you arrived, and it has been very hard to work on you. I had to have a special operating table built so I could do so. I am very surprised that you are even alive, let alone awake, and with your memory."

"Yeah, well thank you doc, how can I repay you?"

"There is no need for that. You saved me and my family, and I still owe you five more lives. I'm just glad I could help."

"Daddy, daddy, you awake now!" Kyle said as he ran in with Loranda, Michael, and Kevin. "You still tired? I want to play game with you."

"Kyle honey." My lovely wife picked him up. "Daddy is awake, but I don't think he's ready to play games yet, he's not strong like he used to be."

"I'm strong, I can play game for him." Kyle was excited, and still too young to fully understand what had happened to me.

I talked with Loranda and the boys for a while, then the doctor told them that I needed to get more rest, and that they could come back again the next day. It was only then that I was informed that doc had a runner go get my family when he saw signs of my waking, and that he was sure no one else would know, except Jake.

Of course, Jake was there right after Loranda and the boys left.

“Hey partner, how’s ya doin’?”

“Honestly, I hurt like hell.” I told him.

“Doc says you’re lucky to be alive. I’m sure glad you are though. Things just haven’t been the same without you, that’s for sure.” He had lost his southern drawl after he first entered.

“What do you mean?” I could hear the concern in his voice, and needed to know what was going on.

“I don’t want to bother you with it right now; I just want you to get better.”

“Come on Jake. Tell me what’s going on.”

“I really shouldn’t. Loranda made me promise that I wouldn’t.”

“If it’s that important, then you owe it to the others to tell me, now out with it.”

“Okay, but realize that you can’t do anything about it right now.”

“Fine by me.”

“Well, here it is.” Jake took a deep breath before continuing. “Knolls has taken charge since your death. At least that is the story all but a very few trusted souls believe. He said that you made that Giganotosaurus angry, and tried to get him killed.”

“Giganotosaurus, what is that?” I interrupted him.

“That is what was in the cavern with you, at least that’s what I was told. It supposedly comes from the Cretaceous period if back on Earth, except that they only grew to about fifty feet then, and this was closer to sixty.”

“Damn, that is a huge mother, I’m glad whoever shot that thing knew what he was doing.”

“That would be Kazak. He heard the shot inside the cavern, and bulled his way to the exit. He told me that he waved you to the side, but you didn’t move far enough, and he didn’t want to kill you. Luckily, you moved some more a second later, giving him a shot of sorts before you became dino-food. Now, where was I before you got me off track? Oh yeah, Knolls has moved most of those who came in his ship, into the city, and has cleaned . . . Has had cleaned, a lot more of the city. They, he and those with him, have even found the way to the outside world, and closed the gate that was there. Seems that the gate was made of the same sort of material that our tunnels are, and this has brought a bit more light into the cavern. I still say there are too many dark areas for being safe, but he has declared it is so. The light that comes in from the other entrance does shine onto another face of the pyramid, but I would think that there would be light on all the sides, if everything is found.”

“He has set himself up as ruler of the city, and has basically become a dictator over the others. He has sent a messenger to tell us that we will send a certain amount of food, or he will take it by force. He had some of his most trusted people take the lions share of the weapons and ammo, all of the cases of mil-rats, and all the medical supplies they could, under cover of darkness one night, while his people were standing watch, before declaring his power.”

“He doesn’t dare come back at us through the tunnel, or we can stop his forces with what we do have left, but we don’t have as much as he thinks we do, and he could win a concerted attack.”

“When are we supposed to bring this food to him?” I asked.

“You can’t be serious. That bump on the head really did scramble your brains, didn’t it?”

“If only you knew. Now, when does it go?”

“The first harvest is in two weeks. We are supposed to bring half of what’s picked, every two weeks after that, too.”

“Good, that gives me some time to get back on my feet.” I started to develop a plan.

“Are you crazy? We can’t give him half of our crops each time we harvest; we’ll end up starving to death. He already has all the animals, and mil-rats, we have nothing to fall-back on. And Randal, we lost the two youngest children when the milk ran out.”

“Son of a bitch.” I cursed, not being able to curb my tongue under the circumstances. “All right, this is what I need you to do . . .”

* * *

During the next two weeks, I forced myself to walk around, and start eating normal foods again, no more tubes. I was unable to show my face in the open, as we didn’t know if there were any spies amongst us, and my plan hinged on my still being dead. I was able to see my family, including all of those Loranda and I had taken in, which helped a lot. Jake would come by daily, but never at the same time two days in a row, just to keep me informed, and find out what I had in mind.

At the end of those two weeks, I was still pretty weak, though I tried to hide it more and more each day. Doctor Akiro Takahashi didn't feel I was ready for what lay ahead, but also understood the need for me to do what I had to. He warned me that I would be in pain, and still very weak, yet gave me a couple of pills for me to take an hour before I started any strenuous activity.

Finally the time had come. Jake had arranged for the guards to be temporarily blind, bringing the loaded down wagon near doc's home.

"Here's the wagon you wanted, and full of our harvest." Jake said to me. "I really hope you know what you're doing."

"I don't plan to let this keep happening, so I hope it works." I then slid into the small compartment that I had asked him to build the wagon around, keeping it hidden. "Let's get this over with."

Jake then slid in my weapons that I had asked for, along with a canteen of water. I had put on my body gear before the wagon had pulled up.

The wagon was pulled by forty men, all using knotted ropes. It could then be slowed down by going to the back of the wagon, and pulling the opposite direction, if need be. The wagon was loaded with more than half of our harvest, as we had to make it as full as possible, so Knolls wouldn't just have the wagon unloaded outside the walls. I had a plan if that happened, but it was much riskier, and I wasn't in good enough condition to want to exert myself that much more.

As soon as the wagon was lowered past the bottom of the ramp that came off the tunnel entrance, two dozen unhappy

looking guards told the laborers to go home. They complied after asking about when they would get the wagon back, being told that it would be back before it would be needed again.

There were then an amount of city laborers about equal to those from Randalville, brought to the wagon for pulling it into the city walls. At the gate, several guards checked the contents of the wagon with spears, swords, and a pitch-fork, looking under the wagon for anyone trying to sneak in that way. It was then brought in next to the pyramid entrance.

Those same laborers unloaded the wagon, taking all the food into the pyramid, before being released. The wagon just sat there, which meant that I did the same. The compartment I was in had a slope to it, coming to a very narrow area at the feet, and only enough room for me to lay down flat at the front, near the tongue of the wagon. It wasn't very comfortable, and that only made waiting another hour seem like forever. As the sun went down, the radiant material would start to shine less light, so I waited until it was more like a glow before taking the pills doc had given me.

My compartment had very small holes, letting me see in each of three directions, excluding behind me. It was enough to let me watch for guards, and to see how light it was.

Knowing that I would need to be quiet, I had asked Jake to have Damon make some silencers for the mini-Uzi's, and my .45 automatic. It would now be time to see how well they worked. After lying for another forty five to fifty minutes, I overheard a guard talking to someone on the street.

"What are you doing out here after curfew?" The guard asked in a hoarse whisper.

“I’m sorry, I lost track of time at a friends house. I only live in that home there.” A young female voice whispered in return.

“I’ll let it slide this time, but I’ll be over after my shift to get payment for not turning you in, unless you’d rather I did.”

“No, please don’t do that, I have a young child to care for, and there’s no way I could survive out there with all those dinosaurs.” She pleaded.

“Okay then, I’ll see you in a couple of hours. Be ready.”

I couldn’t believe what I’d heard, the filthy rotten scum. This place was already a prison to all but the few that were in charge. Why hadn’t I done something about this Knolls jerk when I first met him? I waited a few minutes, and then quietly unlatched the first section of the compartments bottom run. I poked my head down, just far enough to see with one eye, looking in one direction, nothing. I checked another direction, and still nothing, where had the guard gone? I then looked in the last direction, seeing an eye looking back at me.

“I thought I heard something.” The same guard said to me as he started to reach for his gun. Luckily, I already had mine in hand. I aimed quickly and fired a short burst into his face. He dropped to the ground and I unlatched the rest of the compartment, dropping to the ground myself. I was amazed at how quiet the silencer had made the Uzi I had used.

From under the wagon, I could only see one other guard. He was on the other side of the intersection the wagon was parked in, some distance away from the guard I had just

killed. He didn't seem to notice anything so I checked for weapons and ammo. The dead guard had an M-16/12 Gauge combo, a web-belt with canteen, six spare magazines in the belt, a bandolier of shot-gun shells, and a combat knife. I grabbed it all, placing the belt around my waist, the bandolier over my head and around one shoulder, the rifle over the other shoulder, and left the knife in its belt-sheath.

Looking under the wagon at the other guard's location now revealed two pair of feet with boots on them.

I figured I'd better act fast, and needed to take out both guards, if that's what both were, quickly. Placing both mini-Uzis on full auto, I stood. Yes, both men were guards, and as I finished aiming, one of those men turned toward me, pointing in my direction. I fired both guns in figure-eight patterns, hitting both guards before either could utter a word of warning. The only sounds were the poofing of the guns, and the dropping of both bodies.

I turned quickly in a full circle, looking to see if there was anyone else to worry about. Seeing no one, I cautiously approached the two men's bodies, finding one of them still alive. I had to bring him back to consciousness so I could talk with him.

"Where's Knolls?" I asked directly.

"Why should I tell you?" The dying guard asked.

"Because you're already dead. We don't have the means available to keep you alive, but it's going to be a very long, painful process with the wounds you have. If you tell me where he is, I can make it much quicker for you."

"Some choice. Die or die slowly."

"It depends on how long you want the pain."

“All right, but first realize that not everyone that does what he wants is bad. There are a few really bad . . .” The man coughed a bit, spitting up a small amount of blood, before continuing. “ . . . ones, and some that are taking advantage of the situation, but most are just those trying to get by.” Another coughing fit.

“I’ll keep that in mind, now where is he?”

“Down that hall there, third door on the left.”

“Thanks.” I told him as I drew the knife from the web belt sheath.

“Wait a second.” He pleaded quickly.

“What?”

“Would you give this to Abigale Moralis for me?” He handed me a necklace with a ring on it, nearly loosing it during yet another coughing fit, spitting a larger amount of blood than before.

“Sure, what’s it for?”

“Just tell her I’m sorry, and to go back to the man she loves.”

“No problem.” This was taking too long. “Anything else?”

“Yeah. Use this blade here, I know it’s sharp. And kill Knolls for those good people out there.” He tried to hand me his knife, hilt first, dropping it from a lack of strength. He then exposed his throat and closed his eyes, opening the way for me to puncture his carotid artery, before giving up the struggle. I placed the necklace and ring into a shirt pocket.

I made it only two steps from him before turning my head and throwing up. It’s not easy killing others, no matter how justified.

I grabbed an M-16 with an M-203, and a bandolier full of grenades and left the previous rifle, feeling this one would work better, before leaving the scene of death.

It only took a few seconds to reach the hallway I had been pointed toward, and quietly opened the door, unsure what to expect. Behind the door was another corridor that extended close to thirty feet, before turning right. At the end of the straight-away, still remaining quiet, I bent my knees to a squatting position before taking a quick-glance around the corner.

There was Knolls, sitting at a table, faced away, and greedily eating from a bowl of fruits and vegetables like he didn't have a care in this world.

I made sure the safety was off on the M-16/M-203 and turned the corner, gun first, but no Knolls in my sight. His chair had been moved out from the table, and I was about to crouch down, when I caught a glance of the back of a foot leaving to the right, near the back of the room. I covered the distance of the room in a couple of seconds and noticed a set of stairs leading down to an unknown area.

There was no other noticeable exit, and I didn't like the possibilities ahead. I had to act fast, and made a split second decision to follow him down those steps, the alternative was to hesitate, giving him time to get away, or to have time to set up an ambush.

As I stepped off of the last stair, into a dark room, I just couldn't see very much. I had a foreboding feeling come over me just as an elbow landed at the back of my head. The explosion of pain from the blow nearly made me black out, and to this day, I can only believe that my adrenaline

flowing through my body is the only thing that saved me. Instinctively, I kicked backwards, connecting with a leg, and heard a grunt of agony escape from my assailant.

I was a little slow turning around, but realized that I wasn't in any immediate danger. Mr. Knolls was sitting on the floor, holding his right leg at the knee with both hands.

"You asshole!" He exclaimed. "How dare you come into my city, kill my bodyguards, interrupt my meal, and then break my leg? Do you know who..?"

"Oh shut the hell up." I interrupted him. "You're one to talk, leaving me for dead after announcing our presence to that Giganotosaurus a few months back."

It took just a moment for him to respond. "Wagner, Randal Wagner?" I could hear the fear creeping into his voice. "I thought you were dead!"

"Oh, I'm alive all right, no thanks to you." I was starting to feel the effects of too much exertion, too soon after my injuries, when I noticed the tears that had started streaming down his face, the worry coming through his speech as he continued.

"But, but I was told that you were dead, that you didn't survive the surgery."

A smirk showed on my face that backed him up further as I spoke, using his good leg to try pushing him away. "That was probably done to keep me alive. Now that you know I am, I'll just have to settle our differences my way."

"You've already ruined my leg, what else do you want?"

"I'd say I've got some pretty good ideas, don't you worry about that." I paused. "Actually, you probably should worry about it, a lot."

I was contemplating how I was going to get him up the stairs when three guards came into the room above us.

"Where'd Mr. Knolls go?" I heard one of them ask.

"He's down here with me, Wagner, and he says his leg is broken. Don't you fret none, because I'm going to let one of you kind gentlemen bring him up the steps, albeit with a gun to his back. Any funny business, and no more Master Knolls, and at that range, those bullets will more than likely kill the man helping him as well. Be very careful, my trigger fingers aren't as steady as they once were."

One of the men came down with empty hands to help his fallen leader. With a little struggling, and much crying by Knolls, we finally made it up the stairs.

"Randy?" One of the other two guards questioned after recognizing who I was. "We were told that you were dead. Come to think of it, Master, um Mr. Knolls here told us that you were dead himself, and that you had left him in charge if anything were to happen to you."

"As you can see, I'm not dead at all, nor is this the way I would envision mankind starting over. This excuse for a man has lied to you all, and corrupted a lot of lives." I didn't yet tell them about Knolls' being told I was dead.

"Don't listen to him, he's lying." Knolls spoke up.

"Sorry Mr. Knolls." Said the third guard. "But it's pretty obvious as to who is the liar here. I think it's best if I gather the populous so they can hear what's going on."

"And I'll make sure that none of his loyal guards come in until things get sorted out." Put in the first guard, still holding Knolls' torso. "Now Boss, I mean Mr. Knolls, how about we set you down in that chair over there?"

“Not quite so fast.” I told him, and then pressed my rifle against Knolls’ neck, and using my free hand to check for weapons, finding a .45 auto and two spare magazines of ammo. “Now you can let him sit, and he’s going to need a doctor.”

The remaining guard then described to me in some detail how Knolls had over one thousand men executed during the past few months, any of those foolish enough to voice their opinions about his new rules, anyway.

It took nearly an hour to get the people from the city together near the foot of the pyramid, minus some mothers and small children. Several of the guards were there, tied up, and at one end of the pyramid, covered by other guards that were still armed.

I don’t like making speeches, but realized that I needed to make one right now.

“In case you don’t know me, I am Randal Wagner.” I started, speaking loudly so I could be heard by as many as possible. “I was the leader of those people who helped bring you here after your ship landed.” Nearly all eyes were on me. “Mr. Knolls here, nearly got me killed, and sentenced others to death by torture. I understand the death sentence when necessary, though it seems to have been abused in this case, but I don’t understand the torture at all. It seems that there has been an unjust balance of power here in my absence, and I want anyone who supported Mr. Knolls’ idea of governing you, to please step up here to my left, on that first ledge of the pyramid.” Only a few people from the crowd climbed up.

“Is that all of you?” I asked, confused as to how so many could be controlled by so few.

“No.” Spoke a woman of about twenty-five with a nice figure. “This guy here took advantage of things all the time, and was protected by Knolls and his goons in lieu of information about others opposed to him.” She said aloud. Two armed guards picked him from the crowd, placing him with the others.

“And these two guys here, also.” Another young lady, about fifteen, spoke up.

By the time the people were done, there were seventeen more men, and one woman added to the group of outcasts, and relieved of all weapons.

“All right then. All of these people, and I use the term lightly, are hereby banished to the outside world. Each will be allowed to take a knife with them, and Mr. Knolls here will be given his .45, and three bullets.”

“Wait just a minute, please.” One of those who had voluntarily climbed up said. “I have a wife and a two year old daughter, they need me.”

“Like hell we do, you abusive bastard.” His wife spoke from the crowded citizens. “I’m tired of being beaten on, and used hard by you and your friends, consider this a divorce!”

“Well.” I said. “It looks like the people have spoken. “ I looked at Mr. Samuel Knolls, self proclaimed leader of thousands, and gave a predatorial smile. “Less than fifty of you? It doesn’t look like you had the people’s best interests in mind, and they are now letting you know what they think about it.” To the crowd gathered, I asked. “Can anyone think of any others that are missing?”

Only one more was spoken of, and he happened to be on watch at the gate during this time.

“Okay folks, sorry to interrupt your evening, but I believe we are done here. I hope tomorrow is a better day for you all.”

As the gathering started to disperse, I looked to the armed guards who had rounded up those who would abuse their fellow man, and/or woman, and announced. “Let’s move ‘em out guys.” Then I too fell in with the guards, watching Mr. Knolls hobble on his hurt leg. I hadn’t broken the leg at all, I had just dislocated his knee-cap, and the doctor had reset it. I noticed the twinkle in the doctor’s eye as he told Knolls that he was “out of pain killer”.

The march to the outer gate was uneventful, unless you factor in the limping and winning from the once fearless leader Knolls. Four guards and I approached the three men at the end of the tunnel. As we had pre-arranged, one of those guards called out in a friendly voice. “Hey Henderson, come on over here for a minute, would you please?”

The man came over with a mean smirk on his face and the haughtiness in his voice from others being frightened of him for too long. “Yeah? What do you want, pipsqueak?”

“I was told your rifle was tampered with yesterday while you were asleep, and I wanted to check it for you.”

“Alright. It’s about time you started treating me with respect.” The guard said as he handed over his M-16. It was at that point that the rest of us swung our rifles toward him. “Hey, what’s going on here? You can’t do that. Gimme my rifle back.”

“Now use your left hand to drop your web belt.” I commanded.

“I ain’t doin’ no such a thing.” Henderson replied.

“It’s either that, or we shoot you down here and now.” The guard that had retrieved Henderson’s rifle informed the shocked man.

“I knew you weren’t no good, you won’t get away with this. Once I tell Knolls about this, he’ll . . .”

“Knolls is here right now, but he’s no longer in charge of things.” The guard pointed to the main body of those coming from the city, just now starting to emerge from the shadows. “He’s the one limping. Now, do you want to drop that belt, or shall we take it off of your dead body?”

“Alright, already. Here, take the damned thing.” He dropped the belt with his left hand as told, then was waved away from it. When he was a safe distance from the belt with the handgun in it, one of the four others walked over and picked it up.

After all of the undesirables were at the opening, one of the guards checked outside. Seeing no dinosaurs, he opened the gate. As soon as those leaving were out, I called to Henderson, throwing him a small sack at his feet before closing the gate.

“Your knives are in there, and the faster you can cut the ropes from everyone, the better your chances of survival. The .45 in there is Mr. Knolls’ and has three bullets in it, use them wisely. Have a nice life, or not.”

By this time, the gate was locked. It only took a minute for the ropes to be cut, everyone on the move, running. Everyone that is, except Mr. Knolls, who wasn’t even untied. It seems that Henderson, grabbing the gun, had claimed leadership, and he therefore left his ex-leader behind to fend for himself, tied up and weaponless.

Knolls still tried running away, into the rocks nearby, when we noticed three raptors of some sort run towards him, catching him easily, and making short work of him.

It was the first time I had stopped the killing of the predators here, the native predators, that is. That decision will haunt me for the rest of my life; still, I can think of no one more deserving.

We left six guards at the gate, and returned to the city, where I had the harvest loaded back onto the wagon, checking first to make sure that no one was hitching a ride, and then had it returned to Randalville.

I had been pushing myself too hard for too long, and it was all I could do to get home and kiss Loranda, before I collapsed onto our bed and fell asleep.

* * *

It was nearly noon the following day before I woke from my slumber. As I was getting finished with a breakfast of fresh fruit and steamed vegetables that my loving wife had made for me, I was surprised by a visit from Jake.

“Well, its good ta see ya up an ready fer another day o’ work!” He started the conversation.

“Yeah. A short one anyway.”

“I is surprised that you is up today at all, after what all you been through. Which is why I done took it upon meself ta have got some thangs done that needed doin’ whilst you was getting’ your beauty rest.”

“I’m thankful for anything I don’t have to do at this point, so what has been done?” I asked.

“Well, they was some things that needed sortin’ for sure. It looks as if we will be alright as far as food is concerned, and we will even have a little left for preserving, if we limit ourselves to what’s necessary. Them folks in the city are goin’ to have to watch how they use their food, too, if they want to have them mil-rats in reserve for back-up. It seems as though Knolls and his yahoos ate like kings and left the culls for the general populous.”

“So it sounds to me like Knolls’ desire to control everybody wasn’t sated with just being in charge, but that he also forgot to improve the quality of life for those he intended to rule. It’s no wonder everyone was so eager to see him overthrown. If he’d of treated them like people, and not killed off all the men that didn’t agree with him, it may have been a much different outcome.” I could see Jake ready to change the subject, his mouth pinched like he had a sour grape within. “What’s the matter?”

“I just don’t like nothin’ about that monster.”

“How about his ending?” I asked, shuddering at the thought of being eaten by the carnivores.

“That’s true ‘nough. There is more that needs to be discussed. We need to have a meeting about the kids, I mean, young adults. It seems as though things have started spinning out of control with the multiple wives, and the young ages. Now it’s even worse than before, it was going to be a few here and there, but it’s running rampant, and we have just lost so many more males because of Knolls and his bunch. I mean, I’ve got fourteen year old girls asking me to be there husband! I’m already married, and agreed to take in a girl of a mere twenty years, because my wife had

already told her I would do so. I've got a daughter the age of those proposing, this is just WRONG!" He was nearly in tears by the end of his speech, and had lost his signature drawl.

"Okay then, set it up for tomorrow night, after dinner." I could feel a headache starting to form.

After he left, I finished the last couple of bites on my wooden plate, kissed my wife goodbye, and told the boys to be good before heading out for the days light duty work I was allowed to perform.

First on my list was to gather a group of electricians, guards, and laborers for the large dark area near the city. It was hard to believe that Knolls had completely stopped all work on lighting up areas surrounding the speck of humanity that existed on this planet. It was time to get back to improving our situation, and to get people seeing results happening around them. The four micro-hydro plants not in use, wiring, and light fixtures were all going to be needed to get things started, most of the fixtures were already set up in movable sections from earlier use, saving time.

I bicycled into the city myself, and formed a leadership to supervise guard details and work parties that would gather logs and limbs from the area around the gated entrance, for some ideas I had.

James had been the first person I'd gone to for the electrical job, so I wasn't too surprised to see him and his help already on the job, when I arrived at that dark side I wanted lighting in.

"You know?" James started speaking once I was within easy hearing range. "There are three bridges that used to

span this waterway. It's unfortunate that there is only one standing. Maybe we can repair the others in the future."

"I don't see any reason not to." I replied. "Have you looked for lighting panels for reflective light, yet?"

"Yes, found some too, but don't have a source of light that does any good. Seems that only sunlight works on them, and we don't have any available over here. It must come from the direction we are headed, so I'm hoping to eventually find the end of this light-way."

"Light-way?" I asked

"That's the term we are using to describe the path that the sunlight travels, to light up an area at the end."

"Sounds reasonable, I guess. All right, I'll leave this in your capable hands, and if you need anything, just let me know." With that, I left to attend to other matters.

My next venture was clearing a field of fire around the gate entrance. This crossed my mind when I noticed how close those raptors were when Mr. Knolls was attacked so quickly the day before. Since we would also need to let people outside to get some fresh air, I decided to have another palisade built on this side too. Considering the problems with the one on the other side, I figured that this one should be much larger, and capable of sustaining a much larger garden area. This would also allow for an extra line of defense against all but the largest predators, and those that could fly, or scale perpendicular walls.

As I was riding to a corner building that we deemed the guard shack, not far from the pyramid, I noticed smiles on peoples faces, several of them even waved to me, which I returned.

My destination was the guard shack all along, so I parked the bike in front of it, and stepped inside.

“Ah, Mr. Wagner. How are we doing this fine day sir?”

I recognized David J. Dudley as the man I placed in charge of the city guard unit last night. Bill Sanders had known him back on Earth, and had informed me that this gentleman was honest and hardworking, so I entrusted him with the position.

“Hello David.” I replied. “I hope you have some people ready to work for the next few weeks or more.”

“Few weeks?” He looked hurt. “Why, I hope that near everyone has a job to do soon, or we’ll all end up like lazy fat cattle.”

“I take that as a YES?”

“Why, of course. What did you have in mind?”

I spent a few minutes informing him of my plans. As he and two of his guards were listening, his smile kept getting wider and wider.

“I tell ya, I think I overheard some talk about some tools that would help the process, out on the ship we landed in.” David informed me.

“Why weren’t they brought here before?” I asked.

“Are you kidding? Knolls wouldn’t leave the protection of the city, and the unreliaables he sent to the ship to get what he wanted, just told him that the ship was in ruins, not wanting to risk their precious lives.”

“I was hoping that runs to the ship had been made, but if it takes a run to the ship to make life easier, then so be it. I’ll need the 50cal machine guns and four 25mm’s to go with at least fifty guards, maybe double that number. We’ll also

need a few hundred laborers, preferably with strong backs, and fast legs.” I told him.

“Anything else?” David asked.

“Actually, yes. Try to round up some electricians while you’re at it, as many as you can find amongst the populous.”

“Alrighty, you’ve got it. When do you want them ready to go?”

“First thing tomorrow morning will be fine.” We shook hands before I left.

Once out of the guard shack, I again mounted the bike and rode over to see how things were going with James.

“How’s everything look?” My question seemed expected.

“Still too early to give you any results, but everything looks in good shape. It’s sure a lot easier when you have a competent crew and enough help. Hell, we’ll have these going by this evening, maybe not all of them, but some, for sure.”

“That’ll be good, I’ll be by in the morning before I pick up a fair sized group of city dwellers for a trip to the second ship.” We talked for a few more minutes while I explained my ideas, then I hopped back onto the bike, and went home.

It was nice to spend time with my family that night. My boys even conned me into playing a game after dinner.

* * *

Morning came too soon. It was one of those nights where you finally get to sleep, only to wake up a split second later, or so it seems. Loranda informed me that Jake was at the

doorway to make sure I got up on time. Groaning, yawning, and stretching, to savor a few more seconds of warmth, which was getting a little harder to do with the weather becoming colder outside, I slowly got to my feet, dressed, and donned my gear.

Jake and I talked a little, while I ate some breakfast and grabbed a coat, before going our separate ways to work. I missed having him come along with me on outings, but his main concern was our food supplies, which he worked on every day. He was trying to get as much production as possible, while still putting seed aside for the future.

It was barely dawn when I neared the city, but there was light where it hadn't been any before, and I remembered that James was working there the night before. "Man, what was wrong with me?" I thought. "First, I don't want to get out of bed, and now my memory is slow." I shook it off and went to investigate what had been completed.

James and some others I vaguely remember were working on some strands of light fixtures when I rode up on the bike I was using for the day.

"Morning James, what's got you up so early?" I asked my chief electrician.

"Early?" He guffawed. "I haven't left here to go home yet."

"Well, why the hell not?" I then noticed the tired expression on his face.

"Too much work to do, I guess. Besides, there's too much excitement from these guys to stop right now."

I was puzzled, so inquired. "All right, I give. What's this excitement you're talking about?" By now I had dismounted from the bicycle.

“A couple of these here fellas tend to think that they saw the outline of another tunnel, but it’s still too dark to be sure, so we’re making a couple more strands to see if they’re correct.”

“Why not send someone with flashlights and find out?”

“You should know me by now. I don’t work that way. I like to do one thing at a time.” His words were soft, yet the meaning was strong, and I never had one complaint with his work, so I let it be.

“Okay, fair enough. How much longer will it be?” Now I was getting excited too, forcing myself to stay put, and let him handle things.

“Well, I could start moving this strand here.” He pointed toward my feet. “Just as soon as you can get your foot off of that cord!” He was smiling at my embarrassment, which made things all the worse. I tried not to fumble as I lifted my foot, and then helped carry the strand of lighting close to seven hundred feet, before we came to the end of it.

I tried to see further into the shadows, looking for a tunnel entrance, but failing, it was still just too dark. One could almost feel the tension in the air as we waited for James to connect the next strand.

It’s funny, but with James, the more you want him to hurry, the slower he seems to go, all the while still getting things done faster than most anybody else here in his field. I just wanted him to connect the lights, and have them all shine brightly, already in place. His way was to connect them, and then start moving them where you wanted them, like a snake moving in an s-pattern. I knew his way was better, and that I was being unreasonable, so I took several deep breaths, and waited.

Finally, the connection was made and the first fixture in line was set in its place. This showed another twenty feet or so into the cavern, but I still couldn't see any signs of a tunnel. It wasn't until the fourth additional fixture that I could see that it was true; there was the feint outline of another tunnel. I just had to wait and see more. By the time the two full strands were in place, the lighting was into the tunnel itself, two fixtures lay within.

"You go get some sleep now." I told James. "I will obtain a fresh crew and get them out here to clean this tunnel, and see where it goes. I'll also bring some guards, just in case."

"All right." He said. "I'll let some of those that started a few hours ago make more strands of lighting; we've still got dozens of fixtures here, and plenty of wiring and parts. I'll start back at it tonight." We shook hands before I headed back to the bicycle.

There were more people than I expected, waiting when I arrived in the city, with Mr. Dudley at the front.

"Good morning Mr. Wagner. We've been expecting you." David called out as I approached.

"Sorry I'm a bit late; I was sidetracked over by the bridge. Turns out that those guys found another tunnel entrance over there, and they need some young adults to go wipe it down. They'll need some guards to be with them, what do you say about some help over there?"

"No problem. I'll have Harry here take care of it." He clapped a hand on his son's shoulder.

"You mean I get to . . . ?" Harry, a lad of only seventeen years himself asked excitedly.

“Yes son, you get to put your own crew together. Make me proud.” David couldn’t have missed the beaming pride in his son’s eyes; I could see it from a longer distance myself.

“I will dad, you’ll see.” The young man left at an all out sprint.

“Well.” David directed to me. “Now that that’s settled, shall we get moving?”

“Absolutely.” I replied.

As we were leaving, I noticed David giving one of his guard’s instructions, and then he jogged for a second to catch up to me. While we were walking toward the outer wall of the city, leaving it behind, he finally told me what was going on with all of the extra people.

“When I put out word that we were making a foray to the ship, I actually had to turn people away that weren’t up to carrying heavy loads, while moving quickly. Nearly all the non-essential males of eighteen years and older, and several of the stronger females are coming with us. Also had to triple the guard section for protection, and included a few more of the heavy weapons, for good measure.

During our trip to the second ship, when passing the first, we came along a herd of *Estemmenosuchus*, or a near enough relative. I would only find this out after describing it to our local specialist in the field. These creatures are about ten feet long, seven feet tall, may have been omnivores, and came from the Permian period back on Earth. It was like looking at a heard of large lizards, with short horns on their heads, and scared us at first. After they shied away from us, we continued on our journey, leaving them alone.

We spent five days at the ship and its surrounding area, a diet of mil-rats, and flavoid soup. It took that long to cut a path wide enough for the shuttle and the truck to drive through.

We encountered a similar, if not the same, herd of those *Estemmenosuchus*’, and a small pack of raptors during our time there. We again left the herd alone, and killed three of the five raptors, having one injured guard from it all.

The electricians were busy with short-wave gear, light fixtures, wiring, etc., while several of us were busy stripping cushions, the few mattresses on board, blankets, tools, and all sorts of other useful items. The heaviest of these were loaded into our two vehicles; we then loaded what we could in people’s arms, by weight and importance.

The trip back was nearly uneventful. The exception was our passing of several dozen of our own from Randalville, who were busy butchering a *Stegosaurus* from a heard that had gone by that morning. This would be new to us, as we hadn’t seen any of these here before, and it made me wonder what else we hadn’t yet run into.

Most of the work party continued to the city, leaving several dozen guards behind to help unload the truck and shuttle, and then carrying those items where they belonged.

There was only one double sized bed mattress, and that was firmly given to me and my family. The single mattresses were given to those diagnosed with the worst back problems, and given to those whom needed to be one hundred percent, as in our doctors, dentist, etc.

The addition of the new tools was a boon to all those working outside, as this ship had been equipped with

several replacement handles for the hand tools that would go through them the most, some of our existing tools needing them badly. There were also several more cases of gloves in this ship's storeroom for work supplies, giving those without calluses a chance to slowly obtain them.

Due to the considerable amount of things left on the ship, and the hope of salvaging more from the first ship, now that the water had long ago receded, I had many jobs put off. This enabled me to increase the number of guards and laborers available, and we spent the next week with trips to both ships.

We stripped both ships of every decent cushion we could find, and the first ship of its few mattresses. We took all of the remaining blankets and linen, every tool to be found, every light fixture that wasn't necessary to keep light available for the second ship, and all the spare tubes for them. All radios, computers that weren't essential, doors, interior walls that could be taken apart, nuts and bolts, etc., were stripped all we could think of.

It was also a busy week for dinosaurs, but only a single pack of raptors caused any real trouble. The pack had seven individuals in it, and we lost three of our people to their attack. The other encounters were all herbivores, and caused us no harm. We should have used some of them for a food source. However, getting the work done took precedence, and harvesting meat would have to wait.

This whole week had been spent doing hard labor, and I could tell that everyone involved needed a break. There were still some interior walls and such in the second ship to be salvaged, but for now, we had plenty of things cluttering

most of our available space, and too much other work that needed doing.

My first piece of business to attend to was to see what James had been bugging me about. He had been pestering me throughout the week, telling me about a surprise he and his crews had found, but he wouldn't tell me what it was, just that I would have to see it for myself when I had time.

Since this day was a day of rest for most of those that had been working so hard to salvage what we could from the ships, I figured that I now had time to go see what it was that James had found.

I didn't really feel much like doing any extra work either, having labored right along side those that weren't on guard, even though I still hadn't fully recovered from my near death encounter, so I rode a bike to where James was working.

When last I had talked with him here, he and his crew had only just found the tunnel. Now I could see that the tunnel had to be nearly a quarter mile long, and lighting was on the floor, placed on one side to allow room to walk or ride to the end of it.

I shouldn't say the end, actually. It was like someone had cut half of it away from the left side, exposing a large, dark, pit-like opening, with another path of some sort going to the left before it.

I first passed the path to my left, I then continued down the half-tunnel for approximately another half mile, before coming up on James and his helpers.

"Well, if it isn't the infamous Mr. Wagner." James greeted me with his hand out.

I shook it and asked him. "So, what's this big surprise you've been harping about all week long?"

He held up a finger. "Okay guys, and girls." He looked like he wanted to choke. "Take a break while I show Randal here what we found."

As soon as he had finished saying it, his work crews started toward the two of us. "Now Randy, if you'll follow me." He pointed back the way I had come. "I'll show you what I've been talking about." I kept pace with him easily, leaving the bike behind.

We walked all the way back to the end of the cutaway, and I was trying to figure out what it was that might possibly be so important, that I had completely missed on my way.

With everyone standing behind us, and being near the edge of the opening, I was informed not to move. James then disconnected the long line of lights, everything going pitch black. Mere seconds later, another line of lights came to life, going down the other tunnel that I had assumed was a path.

"Okay, I give. What is it that I'm looking for?" I inquired, not really seeing anything amazing.

"Come with me and you'll find out." Was all he said, then started walking down the tunnel. Just as he started to speak again, after about fifty feet of walking, I could see the tunnel open up, the floor becoming more of a road. I also noticed that there was an incline to the left, a narrow stairway going up, cut out of the very rock, itself.

"This is the first in a series of stairways that lead upward to a number of homes." James then took a lighter out of his pocket and started lighting torches that I hadn't noticed

before. When he was finished, he took two of them, handing one to me, and continued. "The homes themselves aren't that unexpected." He was telling me as he was ascending the steps; I naturally fell in behind him before some others. "What I found interesting, was what was inside the homes here."

My curiosity was peaked, making the couple of minutes climb seem like hours. The homes were similar to those we had in Randalville, as far as I could tell. Then we entered the first home, and James once again started talking. "If you will notice, on the table over there, there is what I can only describe as a chess set."

I looked quickly at the game. He was correct; it was an intricately carved stone board, with white and dark green squares. The pieces were obviously made of the same stone, with the proper number of each piece, and in their proper placing. The outside of the board was made of a black stone, which surrounded the green and white checkerboard pattern.

"This is fantastic." I said.

"Not as fantastic as this." He picked up the piece that could only be the king. There were two words engraved upon the base, "DER FUHRER".

"Great." I said. "These nuts were Nazis?"

"I think you miss the real; point here." James smiled at me. "They could write, and this is the same as Earth's German language. What are the odds of that being a coincidence?"

What he said was true, it just hadn't occurred to me that way. "So you're saying what? That these people that lived here came from Earth before or during World War Two?"

“I really couldn’t speculate about that.” He looked at me inquisitively. “What I can tell you is that there is more of this than a chess set. Let’s keep looking.”

We spent a large part of the day going through several of these homes, finding dishes, pots and pans, remains of beds, a jacket, an old boot from under a table, and what could only be called Hydraglyphs, left by someone who could pass as a poor artist. Those glyphs showed a ship of some sort, falling from the sky and landing near a big hole in the mountain side, then people going into that hole, with some sort of large t-rex like predator following them. It showed several people dying, while others were trying to shoot at it.

“This does seem to follow your earlier line of thinking, does it not?” James asked me, as I found myself lost in the implications made by this mural.

“This can’t be possible.” I said in a distant voice. “There is no way they could have had this sort of technology in the 1940’s. I was only joking before.”

“Yeah, well. I told you this was worth seeing, but I’m not completely finished, yet.” James smiled broadly.

“You mean there’s more?” I must have looked ready to faint.

“Not on this subject matter.” I was informed. “I mean that there is another tunnel that starts only a few dozen yards from the last light.”

“Alright then, let’s just keep running more lights and find out where it goes.” I started feeling overwhelmed.

“Sorry Randy, it’s not that easy. We’re at the end of our rope, so to speak. Using what we have on hand at the time,

I can only go this far with the electric current I've got, or I might burn up the wiring. I just can't take that chance."

"All right, you're the electrician, what can we do instead?" I asked.

"I could start from scratch, and use some of the wiring you guys brought from the ships, but that will take several days. Our other choice that I can see, is to send a group down the tunnel, and see where it goes, like we did before." He shrugged his shoulders.

"Fair enough." I could see what needed doing. "I'll bring some men with me in the morning, or early noon time, and we'll see what's what. Until then, just keep doing whatever it is you were doing."

"Nearly done there, too. We'll just finish up in the next hour or two, and call it good. We could use some down time."

We kept up with some small talk on the way back, pausing while he switched the lighting, then walking back to where I had left the bike, before saying our departing words.

Chapter 14

I HAPPILY SPENT THAT night relaxing with my family, and talking to Jake about what I had seen. Jake told me that he would go with me the next morning, as he wanted to see these things for himself, which I figured many others would also want to do once the word got around.

I went to sleep easily enough that night, but I had a nightmare about fighting against WWII Nazis, while carnivorous dinosaurs were attacking from the rear, squeezing my people into an ever narrower area. The lines were breached, and we became disorganized, dying from being shot, or from becoming a snack. I had just turned around to find out what was approaching me from the rear, and found a nasty three-spine, when I awoke to a shirt being tossed onto my face by Loranda.

“Wha, wha, what, are you doing?” I was finally able to ask.

“Sorry honey, but you’re going to wake the baby, and everyone else, with all that yelling noise you were making.”

“I’m sorry honey. I was having a horrible dream.” I went into a little detail about it.

“Well old man. Why do you let yourself get all wound up over such things?” She asked.

“I wish I had the answer.” I replied honestly, and then smiled. “Is it breakfast time yet?”

“It was breakfast time an hour ago, but you were snoring away, so I left you alone.”

“But, Jake?”

“I told him to come back in an hour or so. He should be here any time now.

“What did you do that for? I have work to do.” I exclaimed as she looked at me.

“Men.” Was all she said, and then left the room.

I was in the middle of getting dressed, when I heard Jakes voice, and a quick “SHHH” come from Loranda, silencing him.

I finished getting ready, and was at the table in record time. Today started off with a cup of goat’s milk, a rarity for us all, and fresh fruits and vegetables. Noticing how Jake was fidgeting, I ate quickly, only slowing the slightest to savor the milk, and kissing Loranda goodbye before leaving with my friend to start the day.

After we were out of hearing range of my home, Jake spoke up. “Boy . . . , I tell you what. That there woman can flat make a man get put in his place.”

This was a common conversation piece, coming from Jake, and I replied with a simple. “Yep.”

“Yep! Is that all you got to say about it?”

“Yep.” I told him again.

“Ah heck with it anyways.” He hesitated. “So what all’s on the agenda today boss?”

“Quit calling me that, you old hick.” I responded. This too, had become normal banter between us.

“I may be old, but this here hick is a college graduate.”

“More like glad-you-ate, you mean. I bet you got four P.H.D.’s in eating, considering your girth.” I teased him, knowing he probably weighed less than I did.

“Well, if that’s the case, you best stop eating altogether before you burst them there jeans you’re wearin’.” He shot back.

By this time we were approaching a group of men on bikes, all ready to go.

“It looks like you’ve been waiting on me.” I told Jake.

“It’s a possibility.” None could miss the sarcasm dripping off of his statement. “If it wasn’t for your wife being plumb stubborn, we’d be on the job over an hour ago.”

“She can get cantankerous, for a fact. Hell, that’s one of the reasons I married her, ain’t nobody going to push her around, including me.”

“How come I believe you?” Jake laughed. “Now boss, can we please get going?” I just nodded my head in return, regretting it immediately, feeling a twinge of pain in my neck. I kept quiet about it, and we started out for the city.

When we arrived, Jake and I went straight to David’s office, as he had been told to expect me.

“Good morning David. How are you today?” I asked.

“Just fine, just fine and dandy!” He replied in a voice that told me otherwise.

“Okay Dudley, what’s going on?”

“I lost one of my guards last night.” He looked pretty ticked off. “You remember that trash you sent out a while ago?”

“Yeah, I don’t think I’ll ever forget, why? Did they have something to do with it?”

“Honestly Randy, I just don’t know. I’ve got the doctors looking into it already, but I can tell that he was shot through the forehead, right between the eyes. The other two guards fired back, but when I took a group of my guards out to where the shooter was supposed to be, we didn’t find anything, not even a drop of blood. If it was one of them, then they must have been either damn lucky, or damn good.”

“Sorry about the loss. If things keep going like this, we may end up becoming extinct on this planet. Maybe that’s what happened here before us.” I didn’t yet mention what was found in the side tunnel. I wanted to see if we could learn more, before announcing what we did have.

“Now.” Dudley said. “I know you didn’t come here to hear me complain, and that you had something in mind for today, so what is it you wanted done?”

“Actually, I want done what was planned for last week, before things changed so drastically. I do think we should have more guards, now that we know someone could still be out there, and I don’t want anyone going beyond a line of sight, or by themselves. I don’t care if they have to go to the toilet, nobody out of sight, or alone, period. Use the first of the lumber to build an outhouse for those who need it. Now, if you’ll come with me, I’ll show you some of the details of what I want done.”

The three of us went out of the office and rode out to the main gate. The group of guards that had come with me followed behind, and would stand watch while I explained things.

We parked our bikes a few yards from the main gate itself, went up to those guarding it, and David asked one of them. "Have you seen anything lately?"

"Not much." The guard replied. "We thought we saw a couple of those Brachiosaurus' or whatever those long necked monsters are, about twenty or thirty minutes ago, over there." He pointed S/E. "But we weren't real sure about it. We can't see very far, or very well, once the trees block the way."

"It just so happens, that that is what we aim to fix out here." I informed the guard. "So let's get this gate open and we can start phase one of this venture, planning.

At that prompt, the guards opened the gates and let us through. "Okay guys, I want all directions observed as we go. I even want eyes looking above us."

It took nearly two hours for me to show David Dudley just what it was that I wanted accomplished, in what order, and the main how-to's. I would let him and Damon work out the particulars. We did hear some heavy footfalls off in the distance a couple of times, but they were slow and not heading our way at all.

"Now remember." I was telling David. "You should have your speediest gatherers come out here and gather any flavoids they can find in the area you're going to work on, before felling any trees, or you'll just lose them."

"I understand what you mean Randy, waste not, want not, right?"

"That's exactly what I mean." I told him, and then turned to my right, just as a bullet creased the hair on my head.

“Hit the dirt and fire at will if you have a shot.” I yelled while bringing up my rifle, and hitting the ground myself, rolling behind a bush. “That was a rifle!” I shouted. “And not from our inventory, be careful.”

Several of the men were firing in the direction that would have been on my left, before I turned. Nobody knew if they hit anything or not, but we weren’t getting shot at any longer, so we went back in through the main gate, carefully.

“Okay Dudley, you know what to do, right?” I asked to make sure.

“Yeah, I’ve got it. I just wish you guys would stay and help with guard duty.”

“Sorry David, but we have other pressing issues to take care of, and you have plenty of people and weapons. Hell, you even have more tools than us, you should be fine.” As I finished talking with him, we shook hands, and my unit left the area.

* * *

I led my group across the bridge, to and through the tunnel, stopping where it branched to the left. There was James, just sitting down waiting for me.

“It ain’t noon yet.” He mentioned while pretending to look at his non-existent watch. “Are you sure you don’t want to go lollygag around some more, first?”

“Actually.” I grinned.

“Here we go again.” He interrupted, getting a laugh from most of the guys.

“Actually, the only reason I did show up before noon, was because I knew you’d be sittin’ on your duff, not doin’ a thing, until I got here and turned your work button to ON!” Some more laughter came from the group, and even a chuckle from James, too.

“All right Randy, that wasn’t one of your worst ones.”

“Why thank you kind sir.” I gave him a mock bow, while still sitting on the bicycle. This received yet more laughter.

His expression suddenly changed. “Okay, time for serious talk.” He grabbed everyone’s attention quickly, as was his way. “I extended this line by another half strand, which gives you some extra distance with light, but I can’t leave it on for very long. I want you to tell me when you’re ready, and I’ll light ‘er up. Once you get to the end of the light, you’re on your own until I see lights coming back toward me. Got it?”

“Got it, and James?”

“Yeah?”

“Thank you.” I told him

“Go on, get out of here.”

I looked behind me and asked. “Is everybody ready?” I heard positive answers and saw heads nodding. “Okay then James, light ‘em up.” I tried to get Jake to stay and look at the housing, but he wouldn’t hear of it. We were now on our way into more unknown territory.

* * *

We had traveled somewhere near one and a half miles, to my best guess, when we came to something we hadn’t yet found before. A crossroads, or four way intersection if

you will. I had to make a decision without any knowledge. “Okay guys, we go forward for now, then we’ll see what happens.” I announced as quietly as possible to our group.

“Why don’t you let me take half in one direction?” Jake asked. “I mean, it’s not like we’ve ever run into anything in these tunnels yet, and if we do, we backtrack as fast as we can, if possible. What do you say?”

I thought about it for a minute, not liking the idea, but finding no fault with his logic.

“Alright Jake, you take Dave with you, and make sure you take half of the lights with your unit.” I saw Jake smile. “Do you want to go left or right? And how will you know if the other group has come back already?”

“How about leaving one of the extra shirts at this intersection when one of us arrives, if we’re unable to stick around? And I think I’d like to turn left, thereby doubling back toward the city.” Jake’s answer surprised me, not because of his thoughts, but because he had completely lost his twangy drawl.

“That sounds like a reasonable plan. Well Jake, I’ll see you when I see you.”

“Later Randy.” He said as I took off with my half of our expedition.

We rode for another couple of miles, climbing constantly, and came to an exit into a smallish cavern with a road bed continuing through. “Okay guys, I don’t hear anything. How about any of you?” I asked in general.

Ted Fredricks, one of our original members from our shipwreck adventure, spoke up. “I don’t hear anything either, but I’ve noticed a stronger breeze. At first I thought

it was just because we were riding bikes and sweating, but I can feel it now, even after we've stopped."

"You know Ted, I believe you're right." I paused for a second. "I don't have any great plan, so what do you guys think about just riding as fast as we can, keeping our eyes and ears open, and hope for the best?" I heard a general agreement, albeit with some question in the afore mentioned. "Anyone have any better ideas?" Nobody spoke up. "Okay then, let's go." I started pedaling for all I was worth, for nearly one hundred feet. I then pushed hard on the breaks, yelling STOP!

I nearly didn't stop in time myself, not to mention those directly behind me, someone sliding sideways to the ground to stop moving forward.

The road turned sharply to the left, in a shallow downward grade. Not having good lighting to see by was a major issue. If I would have just kept going a couple of feet further, I'd have gone off a cliff, falling who knows how far, possibly to my death, and who knows how many would have followed me to that same fate.

Having averted the disaster, I let myself relax just a bit. "Whew, sorry guys. I guess that wasn't the brightest idea I've ever had." I shrank a bit mentally. "How about we try this slow and steady, on foot, until we have a better idea of what we're dealing with." This time I could hear nervousness in the response of agreement, especially from those closest to me.

We descended on a gradual right hand turn that made a half circle, taking several hundred feet to do so, before leveling off. The road took another hard left, leading into

another tunnel entrance. It was at this point that we could feel a strong breeze blowing toward us, and it seemed that there was a dim light near the end of our vision range, off to the right. Not wanting anymore big surprises, we walked down the few hundred feet of tunnel, turning ever so slightly to the right, becoming brighter as we walked. Finally we could see the end of the tunnel, daylight peeking through a heavy covering of dark vegetation that was attached to an all too familiar kind of grill.

“Listen up folks.” I started. “I want you three to help me clear this vegetation.” I pointed to the nearest three of my unit. “Ted, you and the rest start cleaning this tunnel with the blankets and extra shirts we brought. Let’s see if we can clear this whole tunnel, and quickly.”

Overall, we did clean the tunnel and grill quickly, taking only a couple of hours to finish all but the hardest areas to reach. What we didn’t expect, was the view we had from the grill itself. After all the traveling in different directions, we ended up seeing a view of the same valley where the shipwrecks were. Now that we had climbed much higher, we were able to see the paths of destruction that the ships had left in their wake, along with the tops of those ships, what a sight. I had never been able to envision what the area really looked like, and it took several minutes to absorb it all.

The light coming in through the tunnel now made it possible to see the outline of the cavern. It is a tri-level affair with several of the features being similar to those we were living in.

“We need to clean the roadway up and figure out a way to wipe down part of the other tunnel as we go, once we get

back into it. The road itself is made of the same material, so I'm sure it will keep lighting as we continue. Any ideas?"

Ted spoke up. "Hal here came up with an idea." He pointed to the man, one from the second ship that I was still recognizing only by face. "He said we could tie shirts together, and drag them behind us with some packs on them for weight, also tied to the shirts, to keep them from falling off."

"Well, thank you Hal, that seems a very good idea. Let's go with it." Immediately, several of the men started configuring the makeshift sweeping arrangement, several others were busy doing a wipedown of the road, along the outside edges, showing the perimeter of the road for ease of travel.

We all worked our way to the top of the broad turn before I called a stop. Taking a spare shirt, I then cleaned a flat surface that I had seen from below. This surface was at an angle that would likely bring light from the lower tunnel, to the upper one. I figured it was either a collector of some sort, or a reflecting plate, either way, cleaning the plate's surface would only help our lighting situation.

As I finished that surface and stood up, I noticed that four of the men were tying shirts to their rifle butts, another good idea of Hal's that was discussed while I was busy.

Those with the rifles stayed on the outside edge, while those without them kept to the middle, staggered to make the widest clean area possible.

This was kept up until we reached the tunnel, then those with rifles held them out to the sides, bracing them against the handlebars of the bikes, therefore cleaning part of the

tunnel's walls, helping further with the illumination. When arms got tired, the men would trade sides, and keep going.

The light that was emitting from those areas that were wiped down weren't as spotless as we would have liked, but still kept enough light with us to see our way. We finally arrived at the crossroads, the light down to a faint glow, and no sign that the other group had made it back. We had already been gone for several hours.

* * *

Jake was starting to get worried. They had to have ridden at least five miles by now, all of it at a slight uphill climb. There had been a sort of switchback about a mile ago, yet they had found nothing else noteworthy during their travels. He had started to wonder if he had made a big mistake in asking to lead a group on his own, or maybe just in the direction he chose. He was still pondering these thoughts when things changed, and quickly. All of a sudden the tunnel leveled out, dimly lit at this point, turning to the right for a couple hundred feet before opening into a brightly lit cavern.

Jake raised his hand in a STOP gesture, and gave more hand signals for quiet, and turn off lights.

Down below was a sight that couldn't have been predicted under any circumstances that Jake could have ever imagined. He had everyone quietly back down the tunnel a short distance, until they were all out of sight of the cavern. Those few men that were in the front with him, had been able to get a glance of the same picture that now was singed into Jakes brain.

“People. Real, live, moving people.” Jake thought to himself. “By the looks of them, they had to be human, but how could that be possible? This was the first group that anyone had ever sent in this direction, or this tunnel. Unless some of those from the city had left while under the rule of Mr. Knolls, these had to be some of those that used to live in the old Randalville area.”

“What to do? Do in and hope they’re friendly, or go back and tell Randal about it, and have to ride all the way back up here again.” Not wanting to disappoint his friend on the first solo excursion, Jake decided to have Ted go to the crossroads junction and bring Randal here. Jake then led the rest of his group back to the opening, and let them all see the same view that he and a couple others in front had seen before.

There had to be at least forty people milling about down below, several of them working in the crop laden fields that covered nearly every square foot of available ground. Only narrow paths, the road that connected this tunnel to another, and a single larger path that led to a stream, broke the consistency of plant life, using the cavern floor.

Jake organized his men into squads of four, told them to leave at least fifty feet between squads, and then led the first squad down the road, weapons ready, yet in casual combat march position.

“Halten Sie.” Someone up above shouted harshly after we emerged from the darkness.

Jake and his squad looked up, noticing three men up above with what looked like a machine gun, and a rocket launcher of some sort. Bailey, one of the men in Jake’s squad spoke quietly. “That’s German for us to stop.”

Jake had his squad stop.

“Do you speak German?” Jake asked of Bailey.

“No, I don’t. I know enough words to get myself in trouble, but nothing further.”

“Can you tell them that we mean them no harm?”

“No, sorry Jake. I can tell them that I don’t understand German.”

“Do it, maybe they can speak a language that we can work with.” During the time it took to discuss this, the three men up top were becoming noticeably agitated, and others were starting to approach from the lower part of the cavern, with weapons.

“Ich verstehe Duetsch nicht. Sprechen sie Englisch oder Spanisch?” Bailey asked.

“Nein, aber Herr Dachiem sprechen Englisch. Ein minuten bitte.” The guard replied.

“What was that all about?” Jake asked.

“I asked him if he spoke English, or Spanish. He told me no, but Mr. Dachiem speaks English, wait a minute, or something to that effect. He was speaking too fast for me to be sure.”

“I sure hope you’re right Bailey, or we could be dead real quick.”

That’s when Jake and his men noticed the group of men and women were wearing WWII military uniforms, and carrying submachine guns and rifles from that time period.

The nine of them came to within twenty feet of Jake and those with him, before stopping.

“Der mann, Der Englisch spricht, Herr Dachiem.” One of those above informed those below.

“So you speak English?” Jake was asked by one of those that had just walked up.

“Yes, I do speak English. Are you in charge here?” Jake asked in return.

“Ja, I am Herr Dachiem, leader of our town.”

“I’m Jake Crump, leader of this guard unit.”

“And how is it that you come to be here Herr Crump?”

“My commander sent me and my men to follow this here tunnel, which we did, and here we are.”

“You are not understanding my meaning. I’m not talking about this exact spot, I’m meaning this planet.” Herr Dachiem admonished.

“Oh, that. That is quite a long story, but let’s just say that Earth was having atmospheric problems.”

“Atmospheric?” The leader of the Germans inquired. “What does that word mean?”

“The air was becoming un-breathable, not enough oxygen, and too much carbon.”

“Ah yes, bad air for body, continue.”

“Do you think we could talk while not under the gun, so to speak?”

“Sorry, those guards stay up there to keep out the local inhabitants, and any other unwanted guests. It has been this way for a hundred years now.”

“You said a hundred years. What year did you leave Earth? At least I’m guessing you came from Earth.”

“You have err . . . you are correct, and the year was 1941, in the fall. Why do you ask?”

“Because we left in 2035, and it took nearly one hundred years for us to get here. There’s a difference of about six years that’s unaccounted for.” Jake informed Herr Dachiem.

“I find it hard to believe that Der Fuhrer would let you continue to speak English, after taking over the world. That doesn’t sound like him.” Herr Dachiem changed the subject.

“There are a lot of things that happened after Fall, 1941, which you don’t yet know. Let’s just say that America was never conquered in the war.

“I must hear about it soon. For now, why don’t you and your men lay down your weapons and come with us, then we’ll talk.”

“No disrespect meant, but we won’t give up our weapons. We’ve only just met, and I’m sure you still have some trust to earn, just as we do. Am I wrong?”

“Du hast recht. Sorry, you are correct. We have only just met, and do not know how far our trust can yet go. Sehr, very well, you may keep your weapons. I would like to see one sometime soon, are they German made?”

“No, they were designed and produced in the U.S.A. Is it all right if I bring in another squad of my men with me? I’ll then leave the rest in the tunnel to wait for us.”

“Very good, do so if it makes you feel much comfortable, is that the right word?”

“Yeah, that one will work.” Jake then signaled for four men to follow, four to stay, and one to hide in the shadows of the tunnel. Hand signals didn’t give away everything, as words would have.

During this time, Herr Dachiem spoke in German to his men and women. One could see them noticeably relax in stature, though they still held their weapons, too.

* * *

“Thank God!” Ted said, nearly scaring the crap out of me. He had been hiding in the last tunnel, the one we were to meet up at, and discover together. We had just arrived at the crossroads, stopped our bikes, and started looking for sign of the others arrival, when Ted finally announced himself.

“Damn it Ted.” I exclaimed, after jumping from his surprise announcement. “What are you doing here? Where are Jake and the others? What happened?”

“Sorry Randal. I didn’t mean to rile you so,” He then went on to tell me what had happened, and that we might be needed to support Jake and his men.

The light from our path was only a slight glow now, and those with the covered rifles were already untying the shirts from their rifles, arms exhausted from trying to hold them out.

“Alright Ted, since you have a bike with a light on it, and know where to go, I want you to go to the city, and get Dudley to send as many guards as he can get bikes for, and bring them back to support us in case of trouble. Take another light with you as well, you’ll probably need it. Oh and Ted, try to hurry, okay?”

“You got it.” He replied before taking the extra light and leaving.

“Okay guys, it seems that we might be needed by Jake, so let’s go. Everyone try to keep up, we only have two lights left.”

We rode as fast as was possible under the conditions, with the uphill climb, lack of light, and unfamiliar territory. Knowing that there might be danger ahead also gave us an adrenaline boost, cutting time out of the trip from sheer speed. We dismounted when we came across one of Jake's men, waving us down from within the tunnel. We formed into squads of four, just as Jake had had his men do, though I had an extra squad that acted like a bodyguard, which had been attached to me like glue lately, and we started toward the end of the tunnel. Adding Jake's last full squad to my people, and the few extras, I had twenty four of us. I wanted to take everyone with me, but respected Jake's decision to leave some of his men behind, so I left those five where they were, making it nineteen of us that walked to the edge of the tunnel. I had been informed that there was a lookout post up above the entrance, and stopped within sight of it.

"Jake Crump." I yelled. "It's Randal Wagner. If you are alright, I need to see you right now, otherwise I'm going to assume things aren't good. You have thirty seconds." I could see the sentries up above getting nervous, but not knowing why.

It took nearly the whole thirty seconds, but Jake came out into the open, with somebody I didn't recognize, and walked up the road toward me.

I could see the discomfort in the eyes of the other man, but he approached to within ten feet of me, his weapon within its holster.

"Robert Dachiem, meet Randal Wagner. Randal, this is Robert Dachiem, the leader of this community." I shook hands with Robert.

“Mr. Dachiem.” I said.

“Mr. Wagner.” He replied. “Do you always bring so many soldiers with you?”

“No, not always. I can sometimes escape from all but seven of them. I can even escape from three of those, if I have to use the restroom.” It must have taken a short moment for the translation, but then he tossed back his head and laughed.

“It must be hard to fit them all in the smaller W.C.’s, er ah, restrooms.” He roared with laughter this time, grabbing his side before he was finished. So was the beginning of what would be a very good relationship.

Chapter 15

I HAD LEFT BAILEY and Ted behind with our new neighbors to learn some German and to learn their ways. In exchange, Dachiem sent two of his people to join us, learning how we lived. One of them spoke some English, the other did not. Dachiem only had three other people who could speak any English at all, whereas we had more than twenty residents that could speak some German, if not quite fluent.

I was happily surprised to find that the German community, only one hundred seventeen in all, was growing wheat, barley, oats, and American corn, amongst their crops. This was significant, because they were making corn oil, corn syrup, ale, and oat meal, which we hadn't even approached. Since one of the Germans was a farmer, she started showing us (mostly Jake and his crew) what to do for the best crop rotations, with the soil we had available.

Dachiem also disclosed that there was another group of "Good Germans" that lived elsewhere in these tunnels,

and a much larger group, who left for parts unknown, who thought differently than his people.

More than sixty of us had spent more than a day in their town, as he told his story.

The Germans seemed unstoppable, wherever they went, they struck terror into the hearts of the enemy. They controlled nearly all of Europe, and much of North Africa. It was at this time, when Hitler had people looking for all sorts of ancient artifacts, that one of his men stumbled upon an item in Libya. This was so large, it couldn't be moved by any force known to man, and was at first thought to be some sort of city.

It was immediately claimed by Germany and well guarded. Using those scientists that had knowledge of Ancient Egyptian writings, the code was figured out, and access was gained. Once open, it was found to be some sort of craft, with a storage area capable of holding more than a dozen large vehicles, and over eighty pallets of supplies. In another part of this craft were thousands of man-sized seats with closable lids. This was a major find, but nobody knew where it came from or how to use it.

Erwin Rommel had been asking for another division of troops for months now, and he almost received them, but this craft became the priority when some technicians found out how to work part of the equipment. The whole force was rerouted to the sight, the division and the best of its equipment was loaded into this craft. This meant that an entire company of the new Panzer IV F-2 tanks, and two prototype Tiger tanks, slated for testing against the British, never made it to the front lines. All of these tanks were joined

by four self-propelled artillery vehicles, all that would still fit, and the available spare parts for field repairs.

Not knowing where this vessel would end up, it was decided that one third of the seats be filled by women that were in good standing with the Reich, most of them being nurses, dental assistants, and farmers.

It was a big project, loading all sorts of material; not knowing what would be needed, but was eventually finished. With the rest of the division watching to see what would happen, and most everyone and everything secured inside the ship, a lone scientist pushed a button that read in Ancient Egyptian, “LIFT-OFF”.

An explosion of unheard of proportions shot the ship into the sky, vaporizing all men and equipment left below, for a mile in all directions. That was the last time any of those Germans ever saw Earth.

That same scientist then pushed another button, which read in the same language, “AUTOMATIC PILOT”. He then went to his chair and settled in for the duration.

Our grandparents awoke to a different world. They could see two nearby stars, and the many different planets and moons, and could tell that they were not where they had called home.

The ship landed itself close to a tunnel that opened up into a huge cavern with a pyramid in it, and those travelers thought they had found an EDEN, but that wasn't to be. It didn't take long to find out that dinosaurs were here, after several of them attacked our people, killing dozens before they were driven off.

The tanks and artillery vehicles were off-loaded and used to kill many of the worst predators, but extra fuel was

something we didn't have an abundance of, so we used the last of it to move the vehicles back into the ship, hoping to someday find or make, a new fuel source.

It was after this happened, that the leader of our people decided that he would take everyone south, and look for somebody to help them, figuring to find a city with people and supplies.

“During the night before we were to move south, three separate groupings of our people left the camp and went into the series of tunnels, eventually finding areas to live in. Those three groups stayed in contact with each other, sharing food, trading goods, and inter-marrying, until twelve of this planet's years ago, when one community was overrun by the smaller predators. Since then our village has been on its own. There were three attempts to contact the third group of survivors, but only one woman came back from those three explorations, and she was near death, after hiding from the predators by covering herself with the dead body of another, until they left long enough for her to make her escape. No further explorations were sent and it's now been just over nine years that we've just stayed here, surviving. We've had those same predators try to come into our village on two occasions. Luckily, we had guards in that outpost that fought them back, long enough for the rest of us to respond. Our rocket launcher has only three rockets left, our machine gun, two belts of ammo, and the rest of our weapons are closer to being empty than those. On top of that, there are times that the ammo won't fire; we were starting to contemplate our demise here.”

Mr. Dachiem's story gave me much to think about. It would be possible to accomplish many more things with a minimal amount of work, if I could find what I needed.

That next morning, on our way back from the German village, I started putting ideas to work.

"Jake." I started. "I want you to plant four sections for corn, above and beyond our food crops." He looked at me, puzzled. "And I want you to plant two extra sections of potatoes, and well . . ." I just gave him a written list of things I wanted him to work on.

"Jeez Randal, you don't have cleaning the windows on this list, are you sure you don't want to add it?"

"I know, it's a bit extensive, but you'll just have to trust that it's all necessary, and I know I can trust you to get it all done." As I wrapped up talking with him, I started talking with other men in the group, asking questions as I went.

I was deep in thought, still in the front of our line of bicycles when suddenly lights came on in front of us. We were now close to our own people, and relative safety. I waved the others on, when we approached James and his people, and stopped to talk with him, my "Bodyguards" stopping with me.

"I thank you for sending that boy down here to let me know you were staying the night in a cavern, and for some guards to watch this tunnel. Not knowing would have driven me crazy." James explained.

Maybe I should have left things alone then, most of us already think you're crazy." There was a chuckle from the bodyguards. "But seriously, I need to know if you can point me to a good Diesel mechanic, and a laboratory scientist."

“I don’t know about any scientists, but I hear tell that Brian Schilling, that big burley guy from the second ship, was the best mechanic in his county, back on Earth.”

“Do you happen to know what county that might have been?” I asked.

“Sure do. It was Kern County, over in California. He says he worked in Bakersfield, same town as my brother lived in. Why?”

“Some counties only have one mechanic, making the best, the worst at the same time, and unknown as to quality.”

“Not this one, there were over a million people in that county, last time I heard.”

“Fair enough, can you have him come by my house, first thing tomorrow?”

“Sure. I can have him there before dinner, this evening, if you like.”

“That may actually be better. In fact, I’ll have his family over for dinner tonight. I’ll let you do the invite.”

“Okay, but you better have plenty of food. I’ve seen that man eat, and he has a wife and two teenage girls to feed.”

“I’ll make a note of it. Thanks James, I’ll see you later.”

“Okay boss, have fun.”

* * *

I went straight to David Dudley’s office, once I had informed Jake and the others with me to go ahead and get back to town, I’d see them later.

Once there, I asked him. “Do you know of any scientists?”

“What kind of scientist do you need?” David looked perplexed.

“A chemist would be best, I think.”

“I don’t know any personally, but may know someone who might. Why?”

“Just a project I want to get going.” I gave a sly smile.

“Alright, be closed-lidded about it. If I can find one, what, where, and how?”

“My home, first thing in the morning. Okay?”

“I’ll either have it done, or I’ll be there to let you know different.” I could tell that he wanted to have more info, but wasn’t yet ready to give any.

“Sounds fair, thanks. Now, I’ve got to go. I’ve got a lot to do, and to set up. I’ll see you tomorrow.” Once stated, I left the office and remounted the bike.

* * *

“You old bag o’ bones. First you don’t come home at night, then I get a message that you’re staying with strangers, and now you tell me that we’re going to have company for dinner with only an hour and a half to prepare?” My wife Loranda was really letting me have it.

“Sorry honey. Things are going too fast to not deal with them.” I told her.

“Yeah, well. Cindy is down in the pool. I want you to send her here to help me, and while you’re down there, use a bar of soap on yourself.” She held her nose. “And take some clean clothes with you. Make sure you tie those dirty ones

to a pole, they might try to walk away from you on their own. I'll clean them tomorrow."

"Yes dear." Is all I thought it safe to say, and walked off to get some clean clothing. I was a few steps from our room, when I heard her comment. "Men."

* * *

As I came up on the pool, I could see that Cindy was in the water alone, and I told her that Loranda wanted her to help with dinner.

"Okay." She said politely, and walked out of the pool naked, climbing up the steps that had been placed there to make getting in and out easier.

She was truly a beautiful young lady. Shapely hips, thighs, and legs, with a small waist in between. Her pubic mound was flat and firm, just like her stomach, and she had a nice little rear end, that made a person want to reach out and grasp it, to make sure it was real. It didn't help that she had one of those faces you could fall in love with, just by looking at it, and long straight hair that, if in front of her shapely shoulders, instead of behind her, would surely cover her perky little B-cup breasts.

I caught myself staring, just as she became aware of my attention. "Why Mr. Wagner! I thought you were married."

"I am, and quite happily too. I just wasn't ready to see you quite so . . . exposed." I knew I was turning red.

"It's quite alright, really. Since the multi-marriage proposal came into effect, I've been turning others away, hoping I could catch you're attention." Cindy had a

mischievous sparkle in her eyes. “If you want, I could stay for a few minutes with you, and we could . . . well, you know.”

“If I weren’t married, I’d say yes, but I love my wife, and won’t ruin our relationship fulfilling a silly fantasy. No, its best if you go on up and help her with dinner.”

“If you insist, but I still have my eye on you, and don’t worry, I won’t tell anyone about our little encounter here.” She informed me as she walked the rest of the way out of the pool.

I was trying not to look at her, until she bent over to pick up her towel, in a way that left nothing to the imagination, except for the feel of her itself, and I had to force myself to turn the other way.

I just stood there until I heard her walk away, crossing the bridge, before starting to undress. I didn’t want her to see the predicament I was in, and was ever so glad that the water was cold, for I needed to loose more than the grime I had caked on me.

* * *

During dinner that night, I noticed that Cindy wore only a small blouse, and what seemed even smaller jeans. This made it hard for me to concentrate at first, but all the things previously on my mind came back in a flood, taking precedence.

Loranda had done well with the time she had, help included, preparing a rather large meal in a short time. Brian Shilling and his family seemed impressed enough, and they did eat, especially Brian himself. We went through several

Mil-rats, had some fresh dino-meat with flavoids, orange flavored drink mix, and a sort of biscuit that had been found to work, though fairly compact, due to a lack of yeast. This was the easiest part, as Loranda was already preparing to make these when I told her about the company coming, so she simply added to the amount. We had devised an oven of sorts that worked well enough, and could accommodate three to five large families at a time for normal purposes.

After we finished eating our meal, and the small talk leading up to my main ideas, I took Brian aside, finally telling him what I had in mind.

“Brian. I hear tell that you were a good mechanic back on Earth.”

“I shore was, but since we arrived here, all I get to do is Guard Duty, or Labor Force.” I could see why too. This man must have been 6’4’ or taller, and 300-350lbs, yet still looked to have not an ounce of body fat, just huge rippling muscles that moved when he did. I had a picture of him taking on a raptor with his bare hands, and winning.

“How would you like to work on Diesel Engines, and other assorted systems again?”

“You just point the way, and I’ll go to it.” He replied.

“Can you strip them down and rebuild them without spare parts?” I asked.

“I’m not sure what you mean.”

“Well, it just so happens that we have some new friends here, and they had some toys that ran out of fuel about a hundred years ago, and I’m thinking that the engines and transmissions may have rusted by now, along with several other parts.”

“It sure sounds like a challenge. What do I get to work with?” He was now grinning from ear to ear.

“Huh?” He had caught me off guard.

“You know, what kinds of tools will I have?”

“I honestly don’t know yet, but I’ll meet you at Dudley’s office about an hour after dawn. Give me a half hour grace, and bring any other mechanics you think are any good, with you.”

“I’ll be glad to. Oh, Mr. Wagner, thank you. It’ll be nice to get back to doing what I like again.”

“No problem, and thank you for not bringing all of your wives, I’m not sure how Loranda would have taken it, she doesn’t yet seem to notice that almost every male of age has several, and I don’t know how to approach the subject. She doesn’t get out much from the home, except to clean, or get food for the family.”

“I did notice that you have several young ladies living there, but you’re lucky if you only have one wanting your affection. It’s real tiring trying to keep up.”

“I know every male is supposed to do his part, but some women just don’t agree with that idea, and quite frankly, I’m glad my wife is one of them.”

We talked a little more about other things, and then he and his family left for home, back in the city.

“Good morning you rangy old man.” Loranda was saying. “Are you sure you can function today?”

“What? Huh?” I tried focusing on life through the fog of sleep. “What are you talking about?”

“I’m talking about how you kept me up all night. What got into you?” She smiled. “You haven’t acted like that since

we first met, not that I'm complaining. Or maybe I am. Do you know how hard it's going to be for me to walk now?"

Yes, I had been over anxious to make love to Loranda that night, and I wasn't satisfied with our usual session. It wasn't until after three hours that I was sated enough to finally go to sleep. Now I was waking up to the reality of what had happened. If I could figure it out, then I knew that my wife could.

The thought no more than crossed my mind when Loranda asked. "Was it that Dana lady that came over last night?"

What a relief, I could easily answer this one. "No honey, I didn't even notice her, except as being with her husband for dinner. Why?" I put my foot in it.

"Look Randal Wagner, I've known you longer than anyone else on this planet. If I know one thing about you, it's how you act when things are bothering you, and something was bothering you at dinner last night. You did snap out of it, but for a while there, I could see your discomfort about someone there."

"Honey, you know I've never . . ."

"Don't you try to get out of this. I want to know who you are having trouble coming to terms with." She had cut me off.

"Don't you go telling me about how you've never cheated on me, or thought of another woman before. I already know that and love you for it, but I want to know the truth about what happened last night, or so help me I'll . . ."

Now I cut her off. "Okay, I'll tell you about it tonight, I promise. Right now, I've got too much to do and not enough time to do it."

“Alright, I’ll give you your day to think about it, but after dinner, you and I are going to talk. Now, there’s a Kathy Simpleton waiting for you, and breakfast is on the table. I suggest you get moving.” She turned and walked out of the room.

* * *

“Yes, I’m sure that with what we are growing, and the right equipment, I can make a form of Bio-diesel that will work for engines. I wasn’t aware that we had any diesel engines to burn it with,” Ms. Simpleton was saying as I was finishing the last of my food.

“We don’t, yet, but we might have some soon. Make me a list of things you need, and any others you might need to help you.”

“Oh I will. I’ll have it all ready for you by lunch time today. I’ll have it brought here to your home.”

“Sounds good, and thank you again.” At this, Ms. Simpleton excused herself, and left.

“So, was that her?” Loranda asked after Ms. Simpleton was out of earshot.

“No! Now are you going to wait until after dinner tonight, or not?”

“Well . . . I could see why she might catch your eye, she sure is shapely enough.”

“Oh for Pete’s sake woman, I’ve got to go.”

“And catch up with her before she gets too far ahead of you?” I could hear the anger and confusion in her voice.

I grabbed my rifle, walked out the doorway, and said. “It’s Cindy.” And I kept on walking to my bike. I didn’t see the tears start to stream down her face.

* * *

“It should be right around the corner.” Robert Dachiem stated.

With me were Brian Schilling, four other mechanics, and over forty guards. We were all heavily armed, carrying several of our best weapons.

The night before, Brian had insisted to his wives that he had to round up the other mechanics he had run into, before he went to bed. Seeing the excitement radiating off of him, and hearing his one wife’s description of the evening meal, the rest of them relented.

All of us were now out in the forest, beyond the entrance to the city side of the mountains, looking for our prize. We turned a corner of rock outcropping, and there it was, a pyramid shaped craft of immense proportions. It stood a bit over the tree tops from our point of view.

“My god!” Brian exclaimed. “What is that?”

Robert Dachiem walked to the craft, all of us following his lead, guards out in front of him. As he arrived at one side of the craft, he seemed to be studying it for something. Within a couple of minutes, he reached to a section of the side, and must have found what he was looking for, as the side of the craft started opening. One

section was coming down like a ramp, the larger section rising as if a canopy.

“Those are tanks!” Brian nearly fainted, giving several of us a good laugh, but it was true. Inside the craft were several tanks of three descriptions. “What are those doing here?” He was finally able to ask, in what took only a couple of seconds, but seemed like several minutes.

“We’ll have to sit down and tell you the story sometime, but not right now. My question for you, is can you fix them?” I asked, putting things back on target.

“I’m not sure, but knowing that we have all those tools back at the city, I’d say we should be able to, unless there’s something we don’t know about.

By now, I was able to discern that two of the tanks were some sort of narrow turreted Tiger I tank, and some weren’t tanks at all, but early war self-propelled artillery vehicles, but most were the first long barreled Panzer IVs, called the Mark IV special, of Panzer IV F-2 for those historians out there.

“Good, I want you to work on the Tigers first, Okay?” I was filled with hope.

“Yeah, just tell me one thing.” Brian looked puzzled.

“What?”

“Which ones are the Tigers?”

“Those two big suckers in the middle.” I informed him while pointing toward them.

“I say we see what it is we have to work with then.” Brian stated as he and the other mechanics started toward the largest tanks.

* * *

On our way back to the main gate, I stopped and talked to the guard in charge of the timber outfit that was working outside. I told him that I wanted him to redirect his efforts in the direction that we had just come from, as soon as the crews were finished with the tree that each was presently working on. I also instructed that the trunks in this direction be cut to ground level, in the form of a road at least twenty feet wide.

The guards that had accompanied us were left with the mechanics for protection, and only my four shadows were with me and Robert.

Robert picked up his small security force before heading to Randalville, to talk to Jake; he had some crop talk to take care of before heading back to his own people.

I checked on James and his work force, finding out that he hadn't proceeded any further, due to the unknown factor of the raptors we'd been told about. I was also informed that a protected group of laborers was sent into the empty cavern to thoroughly clean the cavern and tunnels. A .50 cal machine gun and a 25mm were both manned at the intersection to the unknown tunnel, to keep out any unwanted company.

With the ball rolling in all the courts, all I had to do was sit back and wait, and deal with Loranda.

I decided to wait in the city; maybe talking with Dudley would help calm my nerves. As I arrived, Ms. Simpleton was in his office, waiting for a runner to take her list to my home. With my arrival, she went over the list with me in person, no longer needing the runner. The list was all but covered, with one exception, an item I had seen on the

second ship, but placed no immediate value to. I informed her of my decision to make a trip the following day, to retrieve what she needed.

She thanked me and left with one of Dudley's men, to go get the supplies she needed, and take them to the location set aside for her purposes.

After the office emptied of all but Dudley and myself, he informed me of my doom.

"Oh yeah, Randy, I forgot to mention that your wife came by earlier, while you were out in the field, and asked me a lot of questions."

"Such as?" I asked, dreading the answer.

"I was forced to promise not to tell, same goes with the answers, and the context of the discussion. I will say that you may want to get home, it seems she's real upset, and may need you there with her."

"All right, thanks." I told him before leaving. I rode home with my mind spinning in circles, and my stomach turning summersaults.

* * *

"You no good, rotten, holding out son of a bitch. Why didn't you tell me..?" Loranda yelled when I walked through the doorway, eyes red from crying.

"Because I was afraid of just this happening, and I didn't do anything wrong." I told her firmly.

"Oh . . . Mr. Perfect here didn't do anything wrong." She said sarcastically. "And why didn't you tell me about what was going on?"

"I just told you, I didn't do anything, not with anyone."

"Oh, really? So tell me Mr. I didn't do anything wrong. How many people do we have here?"

"Just over eleven thousand. Why?" I asked

"And how many of those are men?"

I didn't know where this was going, but told her anyway.

"About twenty five hundred or so. Why?"

"How many are men, not males?"

"About twelve hundred. Where is this going?"

"How many of the females are little girls?"

"Where are you going with this?" I was starting to wonder what was really bothering her.

"Just answer the questions." She told me.

"Just over four hundred."

"That's right. That means that there are just over nine thousand women of child bearing age, with the men taking most of the risks, and therefore dying off faster than the women, right?"

I thought I could see her point, but I didn't understand it. "What do you want me to do? I'm already working on every project I can, to try to make this place safe and secure, so you ladies can live without fear for your lives."

"What happened to Elizabeth's husband?" She pounded me with another question.

"He was killed trying to help others."

"And how about Cindy's husband?"

"Killed in an attack. You already know all of this, and you're giving me a headache with all these questions. Are you done yet?"

"Almost. I just have a few more."

“Okay.” I said, though what I really wanted to do was get some sleep, after taking about a dozen aspirin.

“So you know the population numbers, and you therefore know that the ratio of women to men is nearly nine to one, right?”

“Yes, I know the numbers.”

“And it was approved that each man could have up to nine women as wives, if he wanted, right?”

“Yes.” I answered, exasperated.

“Then why didn’t you inform me of this?”

“Because it didn’t pertain to us.”

“You selfish liar.” She yelled. “This has everything to do with us.”

“How do you figure?” I asked.

“Because you’re a man, and you need to do your part in continuing the pro-creation of the human race on this planet, damnit. You should have told me how bad things are.” Her voice softened. “Now, I’ve already picked Elizabeth and Cindy to be two of your other wives, and Tequan Jackson has asked if you will honor him by adding Tamara, his daughter, as your fourth. He says that arranged marriages are part of his culture, and he can think of no one he would like better to have his first daughter to be with,”

It hit me like a ton of bricks. Here I was trying to show her that I had always been faithful, and she was arranging who my other wives would be. “You know I can’t do this.”

“Oh yes you can, and you will, too. I’ve already accepted Tequan’s offer, and Tamara, Elizabeth, and Cindy are already here. Now, I have to go pick up the boys, before the baby wakes up and makes Jakes wife, I mean wives, not want to watch them anymore.”

“But Loranda, I can’t!”

“You can, and you will. Now, this discussion is over.” With that, she walked out the doorway.

“Why me Lord?” I asked to no one in particular. Then I heard crying in the bedroom, and went to find out who it was, and why.

As I turned the corner, I saw Cindy and Elizabeth standing over a small framed girl with dark skin, who was sitting on the floor with her head in her hands, a towel to her face, sobbing uncontrollably.

It was Tamara who was crying, and I went over to calm her down, and asked. “Why are you crying?”

“Because I’m not wanted by you.” She sobbed while she talked. “Am I not good enough? Is it because I’m black? Just tell me.”

“None of those things have any merit. I was just realizing how old I am, and how this idea goes against everything I was brought up to believe.”

“So it’s not me?” Tamara asked, tears still dripping down her cheeks.

“No, you are fine. It has nothing to do with you, any of you.” I looked at Elizabeth and Cindy, then back to Tamara. “I’m actually very pleased that all of you ladies think I’m worthy of your love and affection. I just don’t know if I can handle all of you, like I said, I’m not young anymore.”

* * *

Man, I really wasn’t young anymore. Loranda let the others have their fun, as she was getting close to her delivery

date anyway. With it being their “Wedding Night”, and complaining about being sore from the night before, she decided to go visit Jake and his wife for the night. Now that things were out in the open, Jake didn’t have to try to hide his other wives, and Loranda thought it a good chance to get to know them. I may have had one active night, but I wasn’t ready for a second night of the same, back to back with the first. Before the night was complete, I was the one who was sore, and realized that I was right about not wanting several wives. In the morning, after breakfast, I had to take a bath in the pool again. There was no way I was going to go to work smelling like woman all over my body and face. Loranda laughed at me when I had come to eat breakfast, and after my bath, with my hair too long and falling into my eyes, I was laughed at again, this time by all except Tamara. The poor girl hadn’t ever been with a man before, and was sore in her own rite, even with a gentle touch. The laughter of those around me grew contagious, and I soon found myself joining them. What had this world done to me?

I spent a few extra minutes grabbing my gear, before walking out of the home, saying my goodbyes and heading to work.

* * *

With a specific item in mind, only a small number of volunteers were needed for the trip to the second ship. I remembered seeing what was needed, in a corner of a storeroom, when we made our last trip, but it just didn’t seem important enough to make another foray for just that

and a couple of other items left behind, considering what was going on at the time, and the need for rest by all. Now I wished I had made that other trip, as this one was disrupting several jobs, but was of the utmost importance.

Our journey turned out successful, and uneventful. All of us were thankful for such luck and we returned with four rolls of the tubing that was needed, along with all of the fittings we could find that would fit the materials.

Once back, those of us that carried the tubing and fittings proceeded straight to Ms. Simpleton's workshop.

"Fantastic!" She exclaimed when we showed her our haul. "That's more than I should ever need. Now, let's see what sizes you have. Ah, this one here will work perfectly, and I see you've brought fittings as well. Good, that makes my job much easier. All we need now are the crops."

"I'll see what I can do." I told her.

"Okay, thank you." She replied, starting to work, leaving me standing there, wondering if I was needed anymore.

Figuring that none of us were needed, we left her to her own devices, and I released the workers to go about their own business. It was time for me to find out what was going on with the other projects I had started.

* * *

The mechanics were working on the first Tiger tank, trying to find the best way to repair it, when I arrived.

"Howdy Mr. Wagner." Brian called when he saw me and my guards approach.

"How's it going Brian?" I asked in reply.

“Not too bad for now. The leaky bastard sprayed enough oil around to keep this pig from rusting away, and the thick combat paint is barely thinning. I’m not sure that we will have enough lubricants to get all of these beasts running again, but I’m confident that we can at least have about ten of them going, eventually.” He stood up. “I’ll see what we can do to modify these old engines when we get ready to put them back together again.”

I could see the oil sprayed areas of the tanks, and even though he exaggerated, it wasn’t by a lot. “What’s the inside look like?” I asked.

“How the hell should I know? You talked about getting it running again, not climbing inside.”

“Don’t you have to climb inside to start it?”

“Sure you do, but we’re nowhere near that point in the process. Hell, I can’t guarantee that any of these heaps will ever run again, I’ll just give it my best efforts, just like these guys.” He waved to encompass the other mechanics.

“All right, but humor me please, and open the hatch. I’d give it a go, but I still don’t have all my strength back.”

“Okay, this shouldn’t take but a second . . . ar ah jeez, this . . .” He struggled to turn the wheel, not budging it at all. He had a couple others help him and tried again. “This thing is sealed tight . . . as . . . a . . . ahrr.” The three of them grunted as one, muscles bulging.

“Give me those large prybars, will ya?” Brian asked.

I handed up three heavy bars, nearly three times larger than a normal crowbar, in length, and thickness.

“Careful now guys.” He informed the others. “And all of you around here need to take cover, in case these bars go flying.”

Once the bars were in place, gripped tightly by the three men, they again started trying to turn them. "Everyone at once now. Go . . . argh..urr.eeeh . . . aaaah." Brian and the others finely turned the wheel, two of them falling to the ground when the hatch wheel let go with a snap, bars flying from the men's hands.

Brian got up from his landing on the dirt, an expression of confusion splayed across his face. "I never figured that to be rusted shut. That thing was a monster." A guard with first aid training was attending to the other mechanic that had fallen to the ground, a weeping wound slowly oozing a small amount of blood from his left arm, where his bar had caught him.

I looked at the wheel and the rim it sealed to. "It looks like someone painted it closed. It's definitely not rust."

"That's some strong paint, I haven't had to use all of my strength in a long time, and to still need help . . ." He let the sentence hang.

I climbed into the turret, noticing the tight fit; Brian was back on the tank turret, watching me descend.

"Let's see what we've got inside this iron hulk." I had the chance to imagine being in combat with one of these during WWII, with the enemy having only light tanks in comparison. Coming back to the present, I started noticing more, especially as my eyes adjusted to the dimness of the interior. At first, I couldn't believe what I saw, an old medium machine gun, secured to the inside wall of the turret, obviously for easy mounting on the outside of the turret. Upon examination, there were cans of ammo, belted together with metal links. The ammo may or may not be any good, but the weapon itself was in obvious need of repair.

Remembering how the front of this kind of tank looked in old photos, I checked the front right seating area, and there was another similar weapon, this one covered in grease, Cosmoline I believe. This brought me a bit more hope, and I again turned to the turret. Looking behind the main gun, I found shells for the big 88mm cannon. The main gun itself was also coated with grease. Whoever left this tank must have planned to come back for it later, but was unable to. The one machine gun must have been an oversight for some unknown reason.

Brian called down to me, asking if I was okay.

"I'm fine." I informed him. "Almost everything down here is coated in grease."

"Good, we may need to salvage some to make this thing work."

"Yeah? Well, maybe you know a good armorer around here. At least I hope so."

"Actually, I know a damned good one, who says you need to let him look at that rifle of yours. Goes by the name of Mark Suthers. Says he can fix damn near anything to do with firearms, and I'm inclined to believe him."

"Okay, where do I find this guy?" I asked.

"He's out cutting trees down right now, I believe. Big black guy. Almost as strong as me, and intelligent as Einstein, too. He's the only black guy out there wearing a cowboy hat, you can't miss him."

"Here." I handed up the first machine gun. "Take this and set it down carefully. Then get ready for another one." I told Brian.

After I handed up the second gun, I climbed out and down, having Brian hand down one gun at a time. I passed the first gun to a guard, carrying the greased one myself.

“Thank you Brian. We should be back soon.”

“Alright then, see you in a bit.”

* * *

I noticed Mark right away. I approached him and his partner, while they were cutting away at a tree. They had obviously just started, so I wasn't worried about the tree falling on us.

“Mark Suthers?” I asked.

“Yep. What can I do for ya Mr. Wagner?” He asked me in a Texas accented drawl.

“I’ve heard that you are somewhat of a weaponsmith, is that true?”

“‘Tis fora fact, and by the look o’ them MG-42’s, you’s be needin’ my ex-pertise right bad-like.”

“That’s the ticket all right. Do you think you can fix them?”

He looked at the gun in my hands. “This one here shouldn’t be no problem a-tall.” He pointed to the one my guard carried. “That-un there is gonna be needin’ some special attention, and some so-fisticated tools ‘n such. If’n you gots the tools, I might could fix er up to work some.”

“How would you like to change jobs then? Starting immediately.”

“In what way can my help best beni-fit the survival of mine youngun’s? I knowed this here work gots to be did too.”

"The guns are a priority, and there are others that can take down trees. I don't know anyone else with your expertise. Do you?"

"I happens to know one other feller that's near-bouts as good as I am, well, almost anyhow, but I wants to do what's best for us'n here."

I took a couple of seconds to think before replying. "Well, how about you and I go get this other guy, and get you two started?"

"Two o' us to fix them there two guns? Are you plumb loco, or what?" He asked, a doubt in his eyes.

"You let me deal with the why of it, and just lead me to this partner of yours."

He led me all of a hundred feet, to this guy that couldn't weigh more than 110lbs soaking wet, red hair, and a sunburn on his exposed skin that made him look like a lobster.

"This here's Jed. Jed, that there's Mr. Wagner. He seems ta think it'd take the both of us to fix these two guns of his."

"Sorry ta say it laddy, but I got ta tell ya. It wouldn't take the two o' us a day ta fix those wee little toys yuv got thar." The Irish accented Jed told me.

"So you can fix these Mr.?" I asked.

"Jedediah Langley Sar, but ya jest call me Jed ya know."

"All right Jed. Can you fix these?"

"If'n yuv got da tools I'll be a needin', I can."

"Then follow me guys, I've got a surprise for you." I prodded.

Jed looked sour. "I've not been liken' the surprises round here much, if'n ya get me meanin' Sar."

“Yeah.” I looked at him. “I can just bet you haven’t. I’ve not liked very many of them either, but try one more.”

I let the crew boss know that I was taking two of his personnel, before we left.

* * *

We quickly and quietly made our way to the ship. It was a wonder in itself for them to see. Once they rounded the corner of the entrance, Mark and Jed finally saw the tanks sitting there, and the talking really started.

“Blime, but how’d ya get them monsters here? I don’t reckon’ they belongst here atall.” Jed expressed his opinion with a whistle.

“Nope, and them thar Be-homiths wouldn’ta fit in them ships we left in, that’s fa sure. Where’d this here ship come from?” Mark added.

“Earth, to answer your last question, though I’m not sure how it arrived there to begin with. As to your question about the tanks, some friends of ours brought them with their people, and now we get to try to get them back into service.”

Mark looked puzzled. “Is that what them fellas is a doin’ too?”

“Yes, they are mechanics, and they’re going to try to get those things running again. It would be much more efficient if the weapons worked too.” I explained.

“An how about yer main guns?” Jed asked as we were nearing the Tiger I that the mechanics were working on. “D’ya think we can have a shot at doin’ somethin’ with them as well?”

"I don't see why not, there are some shells for it inside." I pointed toward the turret.

"Aye, but how corroded be they, da shells that is?"

I pulled my flashlight out of my pocket. "Here's a light, why don't you go look for yourselves?" Jed accepted the offered light before they both climbed up onto the tank, squeezing through the hatch one at a time, Jed first. After a couple of minutes, they both came back out, smiles on their faces.

"If'n ya got the tools we'll be needin', we'll get right on the job if'n ya like." Jed said with a grin spreading from ear to ear. "I can only guess that ya've got some sort o' plans for making those monsters go again, or ya wouldn't be havin' so many guards ta watch out far the large lizards, I be thinkin'."

"Right the first time." I told him. "Now, you two stay safe when working here. Right now it's time to see what we've got for you to work with, tools wise."

As we started to leave, we heard gunfire in the distance.

"I don' lack the sound o' dat!" Mark stated immediately after hearing the shooting start. It was in the direction of the cavern entrance.

"Me either." I said. "Let's go." I took off at a run, my rifle up, safety off. Jed and Mark only had unusable machine guns, but stayed with me and the guards anyway.

During the few minutes it took us to get there, we continued to hear intermittent shots. As we burst through the cover of the forest, we could see several dozen people working to remove sections of hide from two triceratopses on the ground.

Dudley was there directing several work crews, many of them were all women. Some were picking flavioids, others gathering firewood and kindling, while still others were working on the dead dinosaurs.

There had been a real need to start involving more women in the workforce, many were even being trained for guard duty, as the men were just not numerous enough for real safety. There were no longer any all male jobs; women were even out cutting down trees, and protecting the gates.

With Dudley busy, I just told him that I was taking Jed and Mark to get what they needed, and that they would need an escort back to their new work area, once they were done.

“That’s fine.” He told me, then dealing with the next person in need of his assistance.

* * *

“Thar be some specialty tools that we’d be more’an happy ta have that aren’t here as I can see.” Jed was saying. “But yuv got ta most important ones, and a lot bit o’ most of em. Me thinks we can do ta job right by ya, but thar’s some thangs we’ll have ta do in here, do to ta lack o’ ‘tricity out der.”

“Yep.” Mark put in his two cents worth. “And were a goin’ ta make a few thangs our own selves, usin’ some of that scrap steel, what come off the ship, if’n you don’t mind.”

“You two do what you have too, as long as it gets done. If you need something special, just let me know.” I told them before leaving to take care of the next job on my list.

It seemed as if I all of the sudden had more to do than time to do it all in.

My guard entourage in tow, I proceeded toward the tunnels that led to our new neighbors. Noticeable work had already been accomplished, faint glowing coming from both the tunnel we knew, and the other, which we didn't. At the tunnel/road intersection stood James, our head electrician, scowling.

"How's it going James?" His demeanor gave away the fact that all was not well.

"It'd be going a lot faster if I knew more about which of these two tunnel branches has the unfreindlies in it. Why don't you hurry on up to that crossroads and find out?" He referred to the upper intersection that splits three ways.

"Are you okay?" I asked. I'd never heard James snap like that before.

"No, I'm not. I know it's not your fault, but I've got my dander up after seeing all the remains down there." He pointed to the area below the road.

"It's dark as midnight clouded over down there, how do you . . ." James cut me off with a finger raised to his lips. Then he reached down and flipped a switch, light blaring out of several fixtures that had been lowered from the road level, into the area of darkness, now brightly shining light off of piles of bones.

"Are those human?" I asked, shocked at the skeletal remains of what had to be thousands of bodies.

"I don't rightly know just yet, but I'm not going down there to find out until we're more secure in here. If you look to the left, you can see what looks like a raptors skeletal

structure, but the rest look human from here, and who knows how many more bones are beyond this light we've rigged."

He wasn't kidding either, there were bones covering all the bottom of the lit area, and it looked as if the shadows held more bones in secret hiding. Bones upon bones. A shiver ran down my spine and James turned off the lights. Now I could understand what had the man so upset.

"Sorry James. I had no idea."

"I know, I only found out an hour or so ago. Hell, I don't even know those people, but I can imagine the screaming, and the pain, many of those bones had been snapped like twigs, or so it looks from here. I do know that I don't want something like this to happen to more of us, like happened with the first ship."

Unfortunately, I could relate to this. "I'll let you know what we find." Is all I could find the words to say, remounting the bike, and riding to the crossroads. I had people waiting for me there, and we had work to do.

* * *

"Jake! What the hell are you doing here?" Jake Crump was supposed to be working with the farmers.

"I'm going with you."

"You're needed elsewhere damnit. These people are going to need your expertise to be able to eat."

"Don't give me that crap. You know darned well that you are needed elsewhere too, but you still insist on being involved in the dangerous happenings anyway. Tell me I'm wrong!"

I couldn't, and he knew it. "All right, this one time, and no hero stuff. Understand?"

"Uh huh." Was his only reply.

The light in the one branch of this tunnel was brighter than before, but some of the cleaning was purposefully not finished, waiting until the other two branches were secured.

"Okay people." I had had to remind myself that we now had females with us, six on this detail of fifty plus. "This is a soft probe for now. I don't want you to brush against the walls, or drag anything on the floor. We want it dark for as long as possible. If we run into anything not friendly, I want us to have a chance to surprise them, or escape if necessary. Any questions?" I saw that there were none. "Okay, nice and slow, we don't know anything about this area."

We rode down the tunnel for at least two or three miles, going slow, and with our lights dimmed by red shirts and handkerchiefs. With nerves on edge, we arrived at an opening that I will call a cavern. There was a little light ahead of us, though dim, and I waved my covered flashlight toward those behind me in a signal to stop. Once done, I gave the signal for everyone to wait, and turned off my light. Unshouldering my rifle, I went closer to the end of the tunnel, only feet away, and had a closer look.

I could see that my thoughts of this being a cavern were correct. Seeing no movement in the area I could detect, I used the flashlight again, signaling for my four guards to come forward to my position, and then waited. From my vantage point, I was able to discern a short tunnel that led to a dim source of light, probably a grill like all the others

we had found, and a roadway from my position, leading to intersect that tunnel, and turn toward a lower portion of the cavern. There was also a noticeable breeze going past me, from the direction of the short tunnel.

I gestured for two guards to go right, and two left. I would go out in the middle, hoping to find no danger.

Chapter 16

THERE WAS A raptor, another over there to the left, and three more to the right. All around us were the remains of raptors and humans alike, made hard to distinguish by the dim light, and the dust that had settled on the bones.

Signing for the guards to stay put, I went back to the tunnel entrance, having the others come into the cavern, bringing their bikes with them, quietly.

Once everyone was out of the tunnel, I started signaling pairs into defensive positions throughout the cavern. I continued this until I had only my personal guards with me, and then walked over to the short tunnel, and closed the distance to the ever present grill. Once again, the grill was nearly choked with vegetation, but there were clear marks showing that it had been kept clear in the past. Two of my guards started wiping down the tunnel, while one of them and I started clearing the grill, and the odd man out was standing guard at the roadside end.

By the time we finished cleaning the bars and tunnel, it was close to full daylight in this part of the cavern, and much brighter in the remainder. We could now see features that we had no idea existed. There were still some very dark corners, and shadows that needed looking into, so I rearranged some of the others, and then the five of us started checking out the dark areas.

We located several small entrances into cave homes and signaled two of the dark corners clear, before coming upon a dark area that was an actual tunnel. This wasn't a tunnel like we had become used to; it was narrow and jagged, as if a fissure had cut through the rock. Leaving two of the guards to watch this entry, the three of us left, found the remaining two dark areas clear, with nothing else interesting to worry over.

Remaining quiet by using signals once again, I had ten of the guards stay near the entrance of the main tunnel, and had the remainder of them get into defensive positions for covering the uneven entry into the side of the cavern. With my bodyguards in tow, I proceeded through the opening into the unknown.

Within mere yards, the rock closed in enough to make walking forward an uncomfortable task, at several points nearly having to duck under protruding edges.

After stumbling over the uneven floor, with only a flashlight to see by, for close to a hundred feet, I noticed some shiny stones embedded in the rock, on both sides of me, like a vein of mineral deposits. The coloring was hard to discern in the dim lighting, but seemed to be some sort of light blue. Wanting to know more about the stones, I pulled a few small pieces from the rock and pocketed them.

Another fifty or so feet led me to a right turn showing a hint of sunshine and possible end to this tunnel. With my guards and I paced at ten foot intervals, it was necessary for me to wait a couple seconds for the first to see me gesture toward the opening ahead. In that time, I could see the light dim and then darken to near non-existence, when something at the end started blocking the other end.

Dread came over me as I heard the sound of the raptors that inhabited this planet calling out to its kind, and I turned to flee, nearly running into the nearest guard. He was turning as fast as he could, trying to get out of the way, as there was no place wide enough for two of us to squeeze past each other, leaving me with no protection from the immediate danger except by getting back through the tunnel.

It's hard enough to cover broken terrain during the best of times, but here we were trying to run through a tunnel of it while being pursued by vicious dinosaurs. Talk about a hardship. At least we knew we could call out amongst ourselves as we were already known to be here.

"Go back, quickly! Raptors coming." I called out, figuring that that was enough information. Those nearest to me probably already figured that out, but why leave it to chance.

I started hearing footfalls and knew I wasn't going to outdistance my enemy, I ran all the harder anyway.

The footfalls were gaining on me, coming closer, and closer, I could hear several of them now.

My heart was pounding, my lungs aching, and my legs complaining about the abuse I was having them endure, but all was well until I saw the sun lighting the tunnel ahead of me. Knowing I was close to safety was a relief, but I then

stepped on a rock that gave way underneath me, and down I went.

I landed hard, nearly knocking the air from my lungs. Knowing I couldn't get up and out in time, I rolled over and saw death looming toward me. The first raptor was only ten to fifteen feet from me when I pulled the trigger of my rifle. I had just enough time to realize my mistake, firing the grenade launcher, instead of the rifle itself, before the grenade hit the raptors midsection and exploded.

* * *

"Is he alright?" Someone asked.

"I don't know. Keep pulling the rest of those rocks out of his arm, while I try to stop this . . ." I heard Jake talking. "He's conscious."

"What's going on?" I asked.

"Hold him still." Jake growled at the others. "Quiet you old goat. That was a damned foolish act of heroism you pulled in that tunnel."

"Ouch." I yelled when Jake pulled on something in my upper leg.

"Be still, will ya? This isn't easy to do."

I had moved some. Whatever he was doing had hurt awful badly. "I was trying to shoot that raptor." I finally remembered what had happened. "And I pulled the wrong trigger."

"You damned right you did." Jake was telling me. "You near bouts killed yourself again. I'll be lucky to patch you up enough to get your heroic ass to a doctor in time."

“Am I that bad off?” I wanted to know. “If I am, then just let me be.”

“Oh no you don’t. You’re not getting out of things that easily. I done gave you twice the morphine I normally would, and spent too much time fixing you up, to just let you die now. Besides, I ain’t tellin’ them women of yours that I didn’t do everything in my power to keep you alive. Hold still!” He directed me when I moved from yet another twinge of pain. “Now, where was I?”

“Keeping me alive because of my wives.”

“Yep, if I didn’t do everything I could, there’d be two graves dug, and I’m not that ready to go just yet. You better not be either.”

After a few more moments of tugging and pulling, along with my moving and occasional yelp of pain, I heard him call out to some of those with us. “Get me that stretcher.”

I was lifted by several sets of hands, and placed ever so slowly onto what had to be the stretcher he had called for. I started to call forth a question to him, but it wouldn’t come, only darkness

* * *

I seem to remember someone doing things to my body, and a pair of bright lights that faded in and out, but mostly I remember a jolt of pain, then quickly relieved by a flooding sensation that went through my body.

I awoke to find myself in one of the housing caves that was equipped with medical equipment, and knew I was at one of the doctor’s homes. Then darkness came again.

The next time I opened my eyes, I saw Loranda and Tamara by the sides of my bed, tears flowing.

Tamara noticed my consciousness first. “Mrs. Wagner, he’s awake.”

Loranda looked up at me. “You stupid old fool, I thought I lost you for sure this time.” She started crying profusely. “You stopped breathing twice and you’re sewn together more than a pair of jeans. Dr Takahashi says if you stay still, and want to live, you might be okay in a couple of weeks. It will be another month after that before you can get around again. Consider yourself lucky that Jake patched you up as good as he did, it saved your life, though just barely.”

I tried to talk, but had tubes down my throat, and couldn’t make more than noise. At this time, I also realized that I had an I.V. in my left arm, and was covered with sheets. I must have looked quite the sight.

* * *

Over the next six weeks, I was visited by my family, several friends, and some of my closer acquaintances. With tubes still down my throat, I still couldn’t speak well, but managed to be understood a bit. Once the tubes were removed, I had to learn to swallow my own nourishment again. At first it was just broth and liquid soups, but I finally graduated back to eating soft foods, and man was I hungry during this time.

Near the end of the six weeks, I was finally able to talk like a normal person. This was also the time period where I was relieved of the catheter that had been in me. This too was

a learning process, as at first, I found myself not making it to the makeshift bathroom in time, and those first few urine calls nearly sent me through the roof with the excruciating pain, not to include the embarrassment.

Strength is another of the things I had to re-obtain, and it was slow going. If it weren't for the help of others, I would have fallen flat on my face those first few days.

Of all the things I missed, the one I wanted most of all was information. I was only being told the good things about my condition, family and friends, and the population as a whole. Nobody would talk about anything else, and I couldn't ask for the longest time, it was driving me crazy.

Finally! Dr. Takahashi told me I could go home, but only if I promised not to leave the house for nine days, absolutely no work.

I agreed, of course I agreed. I'd have agreed to nearly anything to get out of there by this time. He and Elizabeth helped me on the way, not trusting me to go alone.

"Doc?" I asked. "Is it okay if I work with my brain and words?"

"Yes, yes, of course. You can do these things, but not working with the body. Walk to the bathroom and back to bed, yes. Walk to the table to eat and back to bed, yes. If stay outside on porch, no lifting the legs too much to climb into seat, no. No more or open injuries, no good, understand?"

"Thanks Doc." I told him. At least I could now find out what was happening around me. "Would you mind letting my wife know that it's alright for me to talk to those people that I need to?"

“What am I, chopped liver?” Elizabeth took exception to my question.

“You be careful Mr. Wagner. Not make wives unhappy. I cannot keep fixing you like this.” He gave a slight chuckle.

“Sorry Elizabeth.” I realized too late. “I wasn’t yet used to the idea that I had, have four wives now, before all of this happened.”

“You’ll realize it in another seven months or so.” She laughed.

“Seven months? You mean?” I couldn’t say it.

“Oh, not me, it’s Tamara you get to worry about.”

“But we only . . .” I stammered.

“It only takes once, yes.” Doc added.

“We’re going to need more goats.” I mumbled.

“I heard that, old man.” Elizabeth laughed again.

* * *

“Oh Jake. It’s so good to see you. Please tell me what’s been going on. I’ve been out of the loop for too long now.”

“All right Randal, but it’s not all good. Where do you want me to start?” He asked.

“Tell me about the cavern I was injured in.” I couldn’t figure why he was across the room.

“Fair enough. The grenade you fired caused a cave-in that blocked the tunnel. After you were taken to Doc’s house, the crew went back, put all the bones next to the cave-in, minus a few raptor leg bones, and caused another cave-in to seal the area. A sort of burial if you will.”

"And I suppose those leg bones were used to build my stretcher." I interrupted.

"Yes, they did the job. And that tunnel should be closed off for good, too. All that rock should keep those ugly bastards from coming through there again. After the area was double checked and secured, we cleaned all of the surfaces so that light could come into the tunnels, all the way to that last unknown branch anyway."

"Damn." I commented.

"What's the matter?"

I plunked down a couple of the rock pieces I had collected from the tunnel before all hell broke loose. "I had hopes of finding out what these were, and mining them if they were useful."

"Where did they come from?"

I told him about my find.

"Let's find out what they are before even thinking about getting more, that area isn't safe, as you should know."

"Alright, how about the unknown tunnel? And that valley of bones that James found?" I needed to find out more.

"Boy, right to the worst of it, huh?" Jake asked.

"I guess so, tell me please. What happened?"

"I'll start with the bones. Valley is a good word to describe that area, as it is just that, quite a large valley for coming underground. It's an anomaly really. It twists and turns, but eventually comes out into the open. It is unfortunate that we found this out the hard way."

"What do you mean?" I felt a sadness start to come to the surface.

"We had seventy people down there clearing the area of bones, dropping them into a pit that must go down a very

long way into the ground, and a few on guard, when a pair of t-rex came out of the rear area. By the time they killed those rex's only nine men survived, one of them died from wounds the next day. Later the day of the attack, we sent in a heavily armed group of guards with all the lights, and followed the valley floor until it came to where it was lit by sunlight. After turning off the lights, we continued further, coming out into the open, and finding a rex nest, containing three eggs. These were destroyed outright, and then moving a bit further, we learned that there was only one way into this valley from the ground, and it was decided that we needed to block the entrance with a rockslide, idea courtesy of one wounded Randal Wagner. Work is still being done to improve the blockade under guard. The hope is to keep any other unwanted guests from arriving and starting over. Another crew did finish clearing the bones out just last week, though why, I'm not sure of."

"I think I do, but there's something being forgotten." I mentioned.

"Well its Dudley's project. I'll have him discuss it with you."

"Not right now. Let's finish what you've got."

"Fine. The next was the unknown tunnel. Having found the tunnel and raptors, where you were hurt, we figured that the danger with the other would be minimal." Jake looked sullen.

"Why do I feel like you are going to give me another body count?" I asked. Dreading the necessary to hear answer.

"Because we weren't being as careful as we should have been. A cleaning crew was sent to clean this tunnel, with

only two guards, and had cleared about a quarter mile, when they were attacked by a group of raptors. The guards killed three, but were both lost. All twenty of the cleaners were also lost. They were only driven back from the main cavern with a concentrated effort from anyone able to fight back at the time, for they came through into the city area before we knew they were even a problem. The people killed a couple dozen of the things that day; we had no idea that there was even that many around here. Unfortunately, we lost seven more guards and citizens, with an additional four injured. Two of those lost limbs, and won't be able to continue with the same line of work." Jake looked choked up about the memory of the whole happening.

"Damn, over a hundred more deaths to deal with." I said aloud, not realizing my doing so.

"It was actually less than that for those two attacks, but it did go over the hundred mark, while cleaning out the rest of those damned things from the tunnels. There was an opening to the plains from the end of the tunnel system. There were several herds of herbivores out there, some like I've never seen or heard of before. There is a large body of water that they all seem to go to, and this must have been a grand place to stave off hunger for a carnivore."

"What did you do with the entrance?"

"We tried to cave it in, and were mostly successful, but there was still an area large enough to walk through, three abreast, and it seemed a good size for an alternate entrance for us to use. With this in mind, we've been putting up another palisade, with guards and a gate." Jake was now seeming well pleased with himself.

“What about the creepy crawlers that taste like pork?” I asked.

“Shit. It’s been so long since we’ve seen any, that they were forgotten. After I’m done here, I’ll go set that up to be done.” His demeanor changed like flicking a switch.

“Good enough. What else?”

“Well, that tunnel with the raptors led to a large cavern. That was where the entrance was, with two other tunnels leading off from it. One of those tunnels was short, with a grill like the other caverns in this complex. The other leads toward the relative north, by Earth standards, but we can’t get through because it’s blocked by a bunch of rock. We can see that there is daylight on the other side of the rock, by looking through a small half moon clear spot near the top.”

“Probably that other group of Germans.” I mentioned.

“That is one of the possibilities that we thought of, the other was another nest of raptors, maybe the ones you locked away by closing the jagged tunnel. Either way, we only came that far two days ago, and wanted to hear what you thought about it first.” Jake had touched on my other fear.

“Well, I’m not allowed to go anywhere, so why don’t you ask Her Dacheim to go with you, or someone else that can speak German, in case it is them, and see about opening communications with them, if they are the Germans, that is. Let them know about the dead raptors, and measures taken to secure the place. If it’s raptors, then try to kill them with grenades fired through the hole, but forget the comm’s with them.”

“Glad to see you have your sense of humor.”

"I have to, to stay stuck in one place for so long, unable to be useful." I really felt that way too.

"I must be getting to know you or something, as you pretty much said what I thought you would." A smile crept onto his face.

"Okay, what else has been going on? How about the tanks and the road to them? How about the tree clearing, and the main palisade? What update on the crops, animals, and guard training for the women?"

"Hold on there Randy. You're going way too fast for answers." He put his hands up. "First things first. The tanks, well, we've got one Tiger pretty much repaired, but the fuel filter keeps giving us problems."

"Easy to fix. It will take two or three full tanks of fuel to clean out the system, for the bio-fuel. You have to change out the filters each tank, to clear it all."

"Yeah, we know. The problem with that is that there was only one spare filter to do it with."

"How about the other Tiger?" I asked.

"No spare inside it. We've been hoping to come across some spares in the ship the Germans came here in, but no luck so far."

"How about the other tanks?"

"Since the Tiger was causing so many problems, they are trying to get one of the Mark IV's going. They have plenty of filters to get three or four going easily, but they have only just finished the engine and transmission. They still have the wheel gears to work on, and check the brake system." He shook his head. "The road to the tanks was finished a few weeks ago, and those extra recourses are now helping

to work on the trees in the area you requested. The logs for the palisade are piling up, but they aren't yet far enough out to start building it."

"Okay, how about the crops, and animals?"

"The crops are doing quite well. We should soon have enough wheat to start making flour. I've already found three bakers that are itching to start making bread, and to teach some others this skill. We are also building several large baking ovens and the first should be completed within days. As for the animals, our pigs are in good health, a couple of the sows are even pregnant, though why it didn't take to them all is a mystery. The goats need more room. We have three kids that have been born since you were injured. I've taken the liberty of moving groups of volunteers to each of the empty caverns to live. They have been helped in planting crops in all available space, which should produce a surplus at harvest each season. There has been a boom with the Bee's and many hives were built to accommodate them all. Heck, we still have extras to transplant elsewhere, if needs be."

"Sounds to me like I wasn't really needed after all." And all this time I thought I was helping so much.

"I wouldn't say that. I think if you would have been helping, we wouldn't have lost so many of our people. You tend to have a sense about things that keeps people alive, or at least more of them."

"You know that valley of death?" I asked.

"Yeah. What about it?"

"I have an idea that could make it a valley of life instead, are you with me?"

“Have you ever known me not to be?”

“No Jake, I haven’t. So here’s what I want you to do.” I then explained it in detail.

After a few minutes, Jake left with a gleam in his eyes that hadn’t been there before I talked with him, and he seemed to step a little lighter as well.

* * *

“Oh Randal honey!” Loranda called out in a tone that meant nothing good for me.

“Yes dear?” I asked in a pretentiously joyous tone.

“Don’t you YES DEAR me you old coot.” She was saying as she walked into the room. “You need to hurry up and get well. You have a lot of work to catch up on, and more keeps piling up all the time.”

“Now what are you talking about?” I was now confused. She usually wanted to keep me from having to work so much. “The doctor told me not to work until further notice, or I’d be out there right now doing what I can, and you know it.”

“Well, right now you have to pick which of these ladies, that just recently lost their husbands, are going to be part of our family.” The mischievous expressions on her face spoke volumes.

“None, that’s which one, I can’t handle those of you I’ve already got to deal with, even when I’m healthy. I always thought having several wives would be fun, but it’s hard work, and I’m only one man.”

“I guess you should be careful what you wish for. Anyways, there’s Cristy Smith, Andrea Yates, Riada

Takahashi, Zietal Schultz, and Joanna Halps.” She listed them off as each one came into the room.

“First of all, I don’t have the stamina to be a husband to those I already have. Secondly, there is no room for those who already live here. Last, but nowhere near the least, none of you look older than eighteen years of age.”

Andrea spoke up. “Yeah well, that shows what you know. I’m twenty one, and room isn’t a problem.”

Loranda smiled. “She’s a feisty one Randy, good luck turning her away.”

Joanna Halps and Zietal Schultz looked sullen, leaning into Loranda’s arms, Zietal saying, “I thought this was already arranged through my father.” Loranda gave me a look of warning.

Riada stood her ground. “My father saved your life more than once. Is this how you honor his work?”

Cristy just stood there holding Joanna.

“You ladies don’t understand, it’s nothing against you or your families. I just don’t think its right. Even with the lack of men here, the most a man should have to deal with is four or five women each. I’m sure that some men want more than that, which are younger and more capable than I.”

“All of you go on into the living room area and wait for me. I’ll be back with you in a minute.” Loranda told them. Once they were out of sight, she started in. “Now you listen here mister high and mighty. The number is nine, actually it was nine. Nine wives per man, not four or five, and guess what, with all the losses lately, it’s now ten, closing on eleven.” I tried to interject and was waved off. “I’ve already turned away several others because they WERE too young

for you. Remember whose idea it was to drop the age to fourteen for adulthood.”

“Yeah, but that was for reasons of work.” I objected.

“And don’t you think saving our race on this planet from extinction is work? Or maybe you don’t consider making and raising children to be real work.” Again the warning looks from her.

“I never said that! But children making children isn’t right, and I ‘ll have no part in it!” I figured that should get the monkey off my back.

“Riada is the youngest of them, and she’s seventeen years old. It wasn’t possible for me to turn her away, due to her fathers help with keeping you alive on a regular basis. Now, I’ve already told these ladies that they are all part of your wives grouping, and you’re stuck with it, so don’t go blustering about and making me look bad. End of discussion!” Loranda gave me a stern look to go with her statement.

“All of them? What happened to picking one?”

“Not going to happen, I just wanted to see what you’d say. You’re now going to apologize to them, and make them all feel welcome. Understood?”

“Do I have a choice?” I asked.

“No.”

“I don’t believe this. My wife is telling me that I have more wives!”

“Drastic times mean drastic measures! Isn’t that how you put it?”

She was right, and I knew I was caught, but I didn’t have to feel good about it.

* * *

After two days of dealing with limited mobility, I was finally able to walk to the bathroom and table without too much trouble, showing signs of regaining a bit more of my strength. It was this day that Dudley came to see me.

“What can I do for you David?” I asked.

“Actually, I’m just here to update you on the other group of Germans, and to ask how you knew what I was thinking about the valley.” I noticed that he talked from a distance, once he walked to the entry of the room.

“The valley was fairly simple to figure out. We needed more grazing room, and there was a valley just waiting to be used for the purpose.” I told him.

“Yeah, but I like your ideas on how to make it stay safe. I hadn’t thought of a barrier for those Creepers or Pterodactyls. It will use a lot of lumber, but the idea itself is a good piece of work. I also like the idea of the dense fencing around that bottomless hole, and the covering for it. I really could have used your brain while you were out.” He told me.

“I appreciate your confidence in me. I just hope everything goes as planned.”

“Oh, it already is. We had all kinds of lumber piling up outside, getting in the way of the work that needed doing, and now we have a way to lessen the problem. With many of the women learning all jobs, our work force has nearly tripled and things are going faster than ever. Your ideas are being put to use all over, while we speak.”

“Okay, how about the Germans?”

“That is coming along pretty well too. A Manfred Doltz is in charge, and they have two hundred and twenty eight people in there. Apparently they are doing rather well and would like to meet with us, especially you, since Robert spoke so highly of you.”

“Great, just what I need, unearned praise.”

“Are you kidding? You’ve been the backbone of our whole society. Without you, we’d probably still be kowtowing to that Knolls creep. I’d rather follow you any day.”

“Well thank you. Now, why can’t you meet him in person at this time?”

“There’s this large boulder in the way. We don’t want to blow it up, so we are using sledge hammers to bust it apart, that takes time.” He informed me, describing the difficulty involved. “We’ve already cleaned all the tunnels. You should see the results when you’re able.”

“I certainly plan to, but that’s still a ways away.”

“Really, how much longer before you can get around?” He asked.

“I’m not really sure, but Doc has me waiting another week before I can even go down to the pool and clean up. As gamey as I feel, I’m sure I’m nice and ripe.”

“I didn’t want to say anything, since there’s not much you can do about it, but I have smelled finer flowers.”

“Is that the reason you are in the doorway? I kinda figured I was wiltin’ the greenery, the ladies are even trying to politely avoid me.” I smiled as I described this last part.

“Well boss, time for me to go. You hurry up and get better, you here?”

“I’ll shore do her, and as soon as possible, too. I can’t stand being cooped up in one place, unable to be any help.” I mentioned before watching him wave, then go.

“Hey honey?” I called out.

“Which one dear?” I heard Cindy ask.

“Very funny Cindy. I just need someone to ask Doc if I can go to the pool and wash up, if I have help getting there. I can’t stand the smell of myself any longer.” I insisted.

“I’ll tell you what. Riada and I will both go and tell him you need a dip, real bad!”

“Thank you for your noses’ concern!” I intoned sarcastically.

“You started it.” Cindy added before leaving, Riada giggling at the exchange.

* * *

“So, Mr. Wagner.” Akiro Takahashi laughed when he arrived. “It seems that everyone agrees. You need to loose some bad smelling layers.” He wrinkled his nose. “I must say that I agree. All right, but I go with you, make sure you not strain too much.”

“Thank you.”

“No problem, we can eat dead fish from you get in water, if not worried fish contaminated by stink.” Everyone started laughing, including me. Doc wasn’t the kind to make jokes often.

I felt really uncomfortable being led to the pool, surrounded by five wives, a set of guards, and Doc. I noted Elizabeth down by the pool waiting for me. For this occasion

a new bar of fragrant soap was opened, shampoo brought along, two towels instead of one, and a scrubbing Loofa, which was generally used by women.

The walk down to the pool took nearly a half hour, due to my condition. I was constantly slowed down by Doc for “safety” reasons. Sadly, I noticed several other people who were headed to the pool, see me, and change their minds, going back to their homes to wait. I didn’t feel I deserved all this special treatment.

On the way, I asked Loranda. “So why is it that others won’t go to the pool once they see I’m heading that direction?”

“Don’t worry about it.” She told me.

“But I do worry about it. That pool is for the whole town, not just one smelly old man.”

“Maybe it’s the smell that’s keeping them away!”

“For some reason I seriously doubt it.” I told her, seeing the smile on her face that could mean one of many things.

“Sometimes, old man, things just are what they are, don’t go reading anything else into it. Now, quit talking and pay more attention to getting there in one piece.”

She was right, at least in part. During the short talk, I had nearly slipped twice, receiving stern looks from Akiro.

Man. Talk about self conscious. Here I was with all of these ladies, my guards, and Doctor Takahashi, who was the father of one of those ladies, and I’m supposed to get naked so I can get cleaned up, in front of them all. I did it anyway, and for the first time since my injuries, really looked at myself, what a mess. I must have added a dozen new scars to my upper legs and torso, one of them not far enough from my reproductive parts to suit me.

“Doc?” I asked.

“Yes?”

“How did you keep me from dying, with all of these injuries all over me?”

“It wasn’t me who saved your life, dat was Jake’s doing, yes.” He was telling me as I started into the cold water, careful to take it slow. “If he hadn’t of performed an emergency suture on your upper left leg, sewing the artery back together as he did, you would have never made it to my office alive.”

“Which scar is that?” I asked.

“The biggest one, there near your groin area. He had to open your leg some, to find the other part of the artery so he could put the two parts back together. Even with him doing as he did, you are a lucky man. I couldn’t have done much better myself when you consider what he had to work with at the time.”

As he was telling me this, I started getting all choked up, remembering how not so many months ago, I didn’t even know Mr. Jake Crump.

All of us spent over a half hour down by the pool that day. All of those naked ladies and myself, while Doc fussed about not doing this, and not doing that yet. I found it amusing to see my guards trying not to look at all the ladies splashing about in the pool. Their job was not easy, as I couldn’t keep my eyes off of all those luscious bodies, and these weren’t even all of them. Andrea and Joanna were both on work details at the time, albeit their work was watching younger kids.

Looking back, that half hour in the pool was a turning point for me, and I’m not just talking about the end of

smelling so bad either. It was when I changed the way I felt about who these ladies were, and what they meant to our future here on this new planet. Mankind would have to make sacrifices if it was to survive here, and we had decided to do just that, even if it meant using extreme measures.

* * *

Later that evening Jake came by for his usual update to me. "I see you've finally managed to clean up some. Damn, if I had to make a guess, you went from smellin' ten times worse than me, to smellin' ten times better than me, I think I'm jealous."

"Thank you Jake." I told him.

"No problem. I don't mind smelling worse than you, not at all."

"I'm talking about the way you saved my life." I said sincerely.

"Oh, that. Ah don't worry about it, it was no big deal. I had to do a similar job on animals sometimes, it comes with the territory."

"A lot of guys would have just as well let some other man die, as to work on another down there."

"Look Randal." He told me. "Not many people would put their own life at risk like you did, to make things safe for others. It's lucky for both of us that I keep a sewing kit with me, and I keep a variety of threads in it. That kit has helped me nearly as often as the First Aid kit I carry, which I also used extensively that day. You saved us from a raptor attack of who knows what proportions, and that was just that day

alone. You've saved a lot of people from death, suffering, starvation, and who knows what else. I'm just glad I could help in return." It was strange to hear him speak so normally while telling this.

"Yeah, well, if there's ever anything I can do to help you in return, you just let me know."

"Now that you mention it, there are a couple of things you can do for me." He smiled.

"You name them, and there done. After I'm physically able that is."

"Okay, I'll hold you to that." He looked relieved. "Now, I came here to let you know that the tree harvesters have cleared enough of the area on one side, to start prepping the ground for construction. There is a crew forming already that will break ground tomorrow. There was also an attack today. Two wounded and one dead, by a predator nobody here has ever seen before. It's a giant snake with two forearms that end in claws. It took out a harvester crew and a guard before it was killed. Apparently it came down out of a tree without a sound."

"Are the two wounded going to be okay?" I asked.

"We don't know yet. They're in some sort of a coma-like sleep, and we can't wake them up."

"Great. What else will we run into here?" I thought out loud.

"Couldn't say, but those who saw this thing in action came up with a name for it, due to its ability to strike hard, fast, and silently." He told me with a smirk on his face.

"I'm game, what did they call it?"

"Bitch. They said it was a bitch to kill, and the name just stuck." He laughed.

"I'm sorry I asked." I told him, and started to laugh too.

About an hour later, right after dinner, Silvia, Jake Crump's fourteen year old daughter, came to the doorway carrying a suitcase in one hand, and a folded piece of paper in the other.

"Well hello Silvia." I heard Loranda greet the girl at the doorway. "Is that a note from your father?"

"Yep." Silvia answered promptly, with happiness obvious in her voice.

"And why the suitcase, honey?" Loranda asked.

"Dad told me to give you the letter, and it would tell you everything. I get to live here now." She beamed.

"Oh really? Let me see what that letter says. You should set down that suitcase over there until we figure this all out." She stated to the girl. After a few minutes, I heard Loranda laugh, then. "You just wait a minute dear, and I'll go tell Randal."

She then came into the bedroom, where I had been, alone for once.

Silvia Crump is here, and she brought a note from Jake with her."

"Yes honey, I could hear you earlier. What does the note say?" I asked her.

"A couple things really. The first is that he wants you to be more careful in the future, about where you shoot grenades off at." I started to get a sick feeling in my gut, guessing where this was going. "The second, is that his daughter Silvia is now your wife!"

"Absolutely not! That is out of the question! Silvia is a little girl, and I'll have no part in it, period." I said defiantly.

“Yes, his letter say’s you’d say something like that, and has a clause to cover it, too.”

“I’m not doing it, I don’t care what it says. I’m not having a wife, that’s still a little girl!”

“It says that she wants it this way, and that you can wait until she is older, if you choose, but she stays here as a wife anyway.”

“No, absolutely not! I’m not . . .” I stopped mid-sentence, hearing her crying where Loranda left her.

“Come here Silvia.” I called, waiting less than a minute for her to come into the room. “Silvia look, it’s not about you. Okay?” I had softened my voice. “It’s just that you are still a young girl, and I’m an old man. I will not have a young girl being my wife, sorry.”

“I’m not a young girl Mr. Wagner, I’m a young woman, and I’ll be fifteen soon. I was with a young man of seventeen, and we were trying to have a child, but he was one of those lost a few months ago, and though I may not look it, I am already pregnant. So please quit thinking of me as a girl and just accept that life here is different.”

I could tell that it had taken all the girls strength to talk as she did, and could still see the hurt on her face. “I’ll tell you what, I’ll let you stay the night, but tomorrow you go home. I’ll talk to your father in the morning first.”

* * *

Loranda came to bed late that night, and I could tell she had something on her mind.

“Okay honey, say what’s going on in your head.”

“Since you insist, I will.” She snuggled up next to me carefully. “Why don’t you want Silvia? She’s obviously a sweet girl, um, young lady, and she is pretty.” “As you just said, she’s a girl. Hell honey, pregnant or not, she doesn’t even look like she’s started puberty yet, let alone become a woman.”

“Haven’t you ever seen her mother?” Loranda asked.

“What are you talking about?”

“I’m talking about how her mother’s chest is flat as a pancake, that’s what.”

“What’s that got to do with Silvia?” I asked.

“You really don’t know much about women, do you?”

“No, I guess I don’t. I somehow have the feeling you’re going to enlighten me though.”

“You darn well know it. Look, Silvia will probably never have any sizable breasts, due in part to her mother’s lack of sizable breasts. That doesn’t mean she hasn’t started puberty, or that she’s any less capable of having children. I can tell that she really wants to be with you. She will have to be with someone soon, and she may end up with someone less conscious of tenderness if you send her away. Would you rather have her be with someone she doesn’t like? Is that what you want for her?”

“You know it’s not.”

“Then let her stay. It won’t hurt anyone if she does, will it?”

“No, I guess not, but I’m still not touching her, is that clear?” I asked.

“Certainly dear. I wouldn’t want you to do anything against your will.” She kissed me, closed her eyes, and went to sleep.

I was nearly asleep myself when somebody came to the front doorway, which had been constantly guarded since my last injuries, and said he needed to talk to me.

The guard came to the bedroom entrance and whispered my name. I slowly got out of bed and went to see what I was needed for, especially at this hour of night.

“Sir.” The guard whispered. “Ted Fredricks is here to see you. He says he has news you should hear.”

“Okay, see him in.” I whispered back. He nodded and went back to the doorway, and seconds later, Ted was standing in front of me.

“I hate to bother you at this hour.” He looked sad. “But I thought you should know that some of the guards just saw a bright white flash in the sky.”

“Probably a ship that didn’t make it.”

“That’s what they figured too, but I thought you might want to know about it.”

“Yeah thanks.” I told him. “With the atmospheric collapse being so close to the difference in time that we’ve already been here, we’ll be lucky to see any more ships at all. I think we’re on our own now. Thanks for the heads up, let me know if you see any shuttles enter this atmosphere, or fly by above us.”

“All right buddy, get some sleep now. We’ll be needing you soon.” Ted told me, leaving to go back on duty.

I went back to bed, once again contemplating the reality that might be, and saying a prayer for those aboard the ship that I figured just blew up.

When I awoke, it was still dim in the cavern. The only other person awake was a bleary eyed guard stationed at

the front doorway. I noticed he was wearing a heavy jacket and couldn't blame him, it was downright cold. The weather had been creeping toward a wintry feel for some time now. I had been lucky not to have to endure much of the frigid temperatures, due to my injuries keeping me in bed.

It was only the noise of my putting kindling in the fireplace that alerted the guard to my presence.

"Good morning sir." He whispered.

"You don't have to call me sir." I replied quietly. "I'm no better than anyone else here. In fact, I think it's a waist of personnel to have my home guarded at night, or to have four guards follow me around wherever I go."

"We don't do it because we have to. We do it because we want to, out of respect." The man looked like he had just had his feelings hurt.

"I appreciate the honor, really I do. I just think of how much more time that could be spent on more important jobs."

"Well sir, I mean Mr. Wagner, I'll bring it up at the next team meeting."

"Thank you." I hesitated. "I won't be going back to bed now, so you can go on home to your family and spend a little extra time with them."

"All right Mr. Wagner, I thank you for that." Slowly, and cautiously, he left.

I started the kindling, and slowly worked the fire up to where I could put a real log on it. Even though we had more than enough firewood, it hadn't had time to properly cure, and took a hotter fire to start any of the pieces that would bring any real warmth.

As a town, we were to the point where nearly all the homes now had covers for their doorways. I had insisted that others would have theirs before us. I'm now starting to wonder if that was such a smart idea, and when that magical day might arrive.

I was just getting some water on the fire, to boil, when Jessica Bailey's baby started crying. If I was in normal health, I would have gone to the child and taken care of it myself, barring the breast feeding, of course. As it was, I had been forbidden by Doc to lift more than five pounds for now, and had to let Jessica get him instead. I felt sorry for the twelve year old girl, or was she now thirteen? I don't know anymore, but I did remember how she had come to be part of our family. The poor girl had been sent into the open with a group of those in our first ship, and been the only survivor from an attack. Unfortunately, she was also already pregnant, at eleven years . . .

"Randal!" Loranda whispered a little harshly.

"What dear?" I realized I wasn't alone.

"Why didn't you answer me the first time? I'm surprised you didn't see me walk right up to you. What's wrong?"

"Time and distance, I'm afraid." Using the phrase I always used when telling her I was remembering something from the past.

"Yeah well, welcome back to the present." She told me as I noticed that Jessica's baby was now quiet again. "What is it you were making, anyway?"

"I was going to make a cup of tea, or hot chocolate, if I could find one." I noticed that the water was boiling and I had lost about twenty percent of the water already.

“Well then, how about tea with honey, and I’ll join you.”

“All right then, you have a deal. Do you want to make it, or do you want me to?” I asked.

“I’ll do it, you already got the fire and water going, and I want to still have my kitchen when it’s done.”

“Thanks honey.” I retorted, but she was probably right, I didn’t know where she kept much of anything. I would have more than likely made such a mess of things that it would take a while to clean it up. While she was getting the tea leaves, I told her about Ted’s visit, and what it was our guess was about it.

“I sure hope you’re wrong.” She almost cried. “I don’t know if we are enough to keep the whole human race alive on this planet. Even with the two villages of Germans, there are just not many of us here.”

“Which is a good reason to have some of these ladies find husbands, so they can get started with procreating.”

Sadness turned to fury. “How dare you even think like that? These ladies are here because they chose you, not someone else. I won’t hear anymore talk like that from you, that’s final.” She glared at me, daring me to continue.

“All right, you win. It was just a thought.” I held my hands in the air.

“And a damned stupid one too.”

Neither one of us had seen Jessica come within a few feet of us. “Mr. Wagner? When are you going to just stop trying to be so old fashioned, and just start enjoying the fact that you have all of us to yourself?”

“What? Oh no you don’t. Loranda and I adopted you. I see you as my daughter, not a wife.” I looked at Loranda.

“And don’t you start on this one either. I’m right on this one.”

“Mr. Wagner.” Jessica started back up. “I have a son already, which makes me more experienced than most of your other wives, and shows that the male chromosome can be dominant during conception with me. I’ve already proven that I can give natural birth. My age doesn’t have anything to do with weather or not I can help bring more life to this planet. You say that you want to protect the human race, but you act like it’s a sin to do the one thing that can ensure the continuation of it. I know some eleven and twelve year olds that are already trying to conceive children, and some of them are with older men than you. The rules have changed since we’ve arrived here, And in more ways than one. Tell me this, how long are we waiting before mating the pigs and goats? Is it longer than when the females go into heat the first time?”

“No, it isn’t, but that’s not the same thing.”

“Isn’t it? Or is that just your way of trying to tell yourself what you want to hear?” I tried to answer, but was unsuccessful. “Now, I don’t know how many more good years you have left, hopefully another ten to fifteen at least, but that’s plenty of time to produce a half dozen or more children with each of us, except Loranda here. She might not be able to have very many more children before biology tells her no more, but that means you can produce a good sixty or more children that don’t yet exist. I realize that you have a job to do with making things work around here for our safety, but you also have a job to create new life for our future. If that means that some of us loose our later

childhood, then so be it. That's nothing compared to the sacrifice of lives that go to protect us in here. Now, I plan on conceiving another child as soon as possible. I already have a connection with you, Loranda, the children, and your other wives. I would like it if I could conceive children with you, but if you refuse me, I'll go find someone else, and hope he is good to me. The choice is yours."

"Who are you, and where did the twelve year old girl go?" I couldn't believe this girl was talking like a college graduate, or close to it anyway.

"I'm thirteen now, and the girl left when a young man decided he liked the way I looked, and did as he pleased. I already had to grow up quickly, so I can't go back. I may as well make the best of it, and choose who I want to be with from now on."

"Well, as soon as possible leaves me out already. I have doctor's orders to do no such activity at this time." I figured that would close the subject.

"I can wait another week or so, if it means I get my first choice of mates. You won't get rid of me that easily." She then smiled like she won the Lottery.

"Loranda, did you put her up to this?" I asked.

"Actually, no. It seems that a lot of the younger ladies, and older girls, have come together during their time off, and have made decisions like this throughout our little society. They seem to firmly believe in what they're doing. I just didn't know how strongly they believed in what they are doing, nor how intelligently they could argue their position." Loranda then smiled at Jessica, while putting a hand on her shoulder.

“We have two sons that will hit puberty soon, why don’t you wait for one of them?” I asked.

“That could be a couple of years away. By that time I could have brought two more lives into being. I do get along with Kevin quite well, but he is nowhere near mature enough for having his own family.” Jessica answered my question in a way that didn’t get me out of the situation.

“Aren’t there any young men you would rather be with?” I nearly pleaded.

“Not even close. If you have that much of a problem with my age, then just pretend I’m older, I won’t mind.” Jessica persisted.

I couldn’t think of anything else to say, except. “We’re going to need a bigger home.” To which the two of them laughed quietly.

* * *

Around noon that same day, Cal Jacobs showed up at my home.

“Hey Randy.” He announced his arrival.

“Hello Cal, what can I do for you?” I asked.

“I was told you wanted a carpenter who could teach others while working on a project.”

“That’s right, though I didn’t know it would be you that would answer the call.” I motioned him in from my seat at the table. I had been playing a game of solitaire.

“Actually, there were several of us, but I was chosen because of my friendship with you.”

“Just how many of you are there?”

“Only one of me!” He laughed. “But seriously, there are over three dozen of us carpenters.”

“Then why aren’t you guys working on the palisade and valley projects?”

“We are. Why do you think things are going so well?” Cal almost looked hurt as he asked the question, but in a mocking way.

“I’m not sure how anything beyond this cave is going, truth be known.”

“Well, I’ll tell ya. The valley project is nearly organized, though it will take several weeks to complete the work. The main palisade is started near the road that leads to the ship the Germans arrived in, and we have some of the area cleared for future building, but not near enough is finished to provide any protection. What is it you needed me for anyway?”

“What I need is one good carpenter that can start an assembly line for making baby beds, maybe the kind you can rock from side to side, or front to back, I’m not the expert as to which.”

“So, you’ve noticed the need for such an enterprise, have you?” He asked, smiling.

“Yes, and I’m thinking that we’ll need them sooner than they can be done, unless I’m mistaken.”

“All right, I’ll do it. Anything else while I’m here?”

“Yeah. Keep all of the scraps from making the beds for burning in the fireplaces, it’s still getting colder, and I’m not sure how this planet’s weather works yet.”

“Will do. See you later.”

Once he left, I continued my game, as it was nearly over, me loosing again.

* * *

The next several days went by nearly uneventful. There were two occasions where Dinosaurs were killed for food and hide. The first of the Mark IV's was finally usable, and the palisade near the city had a fair expansion, but still added little protection. With the availability of a usable tank came the training of tank crews, though only on a short time basis. We just didn't have much fuel for it yet.

The real excitement occurred just two days after Doc cleared me for light duty. I was trying to rest after performing my "Duties" with Cindy, when David McGuire, Daniels oldest son, came up to the house breathing hard, as if he had been sprinting, and telling Cindy to please hurry and get me.

Not being fully rested, I did my best to move swiftly, buttoning my shirt on my way to the outer room. "Okay David, what's the hurry for?" I asked.

"Mr. Wagner, there's a ship in the sky. A big one, and it's getting ready to land near the entrance."

"Which entrance?" I asked with a sense of renewed strength.

"This side, not the city." The excitement fairly radiated off his smile.

"All right." I said. "You've told me, so go ahead and go watch. I'll be there as soon as I can." I looked at Cindy. "Would you mind getting a message to Dudley, and ask him to set up work details for moving supplies?"

"Okay honey." This was the playful name that all my wives called me lately. "But you aren't to work, Doc's orders." Then she took off on a bike.

I put on a bandolier of grenades and my web belt, then grabbed my rifle, and went as fast as I safely could to the cave entrance.

Daniel was there watching the huge ship come down just far enough away from the palisade to not burn it down. It was a good thing we had cut down so many trees in this area. As it was, the ship knocked down a large number of those that we left standing. I approached as the ship was settling to the ground and could hear the engines shutting down.

It took about two minutes for the engines to finish winding down, then a moment of silence. We just waited.

After what seemed like twenty years, but was really less than a minute by my wind-up watch, the large bay door opened to reveal a large gathering of people. They were obviously led by one woman in front, carrying an M-16 rifle.

I exited the palisade entrance and walked toward the descending exterior elevator. "Welcome, to whatever you want to call this planet." I told her. "I'm Randal Wagner, semi leader of our communities here."

"I'm Jasmine Torrance." She replied. "Leader of this ship's crew and its people. We noticed the two downed ships and your radio frequency, though we couldn't call out to you, due to equipment damage."

"Join the club. At least you didn't crash like the rest of us. I'm sure you have as many questions for us as we do for you, but it's not safe to stay in the open very long if other means can be used. Would you like me to come aboard or would you like to come inside?" I asked her, noticing that my guards were surrounding me.

"After what we've been through, I'd feel better if you came aboard."

I started to walk forward, noticing that my guards were advancing as I did.

"Just you if you don't mind!" Jasmine requested.

"These four always go where I go. I've tried to tell them different, but they are the only people that refuse to listen to me, that I know, except my wives."

"Wives? As in more than one? We just killed the last men that tried to pull that one with us."

"Then I'll come too." I heard Loranda call from behind me. "I was his wife, alone, when we first arrived here."

"Very well." Jasmine conceded. "The six of you may come aboard, but I'll warn you, we are well armed. I'm guessing that you wouldn't come in unarmed, would you?"

"No ma'am." I answered. "There are things out here that need defending against more than each other."

"All right then, let's get on with this." Jasmine said, leading the six of us into the ship after ascending via the elevator.

* * *

We had introductions all around, at least enough to satisfy those with Jasmine; we then got down to business.

"The first thing I want to know is why you have multiple wives." Jasmine started.

"Loranda piped in before I could start. 'I'll tell you. It's because we have nearly twelve times the women as we do men.'"

“And how did that happen?”

“There were some men killed in their sleep before we awoke. There was an uneven balance in the numbers aboard the ship to begin with, thanks to whoever was in charge of things on Earth, and until recently, the men did all of the dangerous jobs, getting more of them eaten than women.” Loranda seemed to take things over for the moment, so I let her run with it.

“Eaten?” Jasmine asked, shocked. “Eaten by what?”

“Didn’t you look outside at the local fauna?” I asked.

“We were kind of busy until right before we landed. The only one that could have seen anything was the co-pilot, since the pilot was killed in the fight over control of the ship. Why? What’s out there?”

“Dinosaurs!” Loranda stated. “Lots and lots of Dinosaurs. Including a large number of the kind we don’t like, and that don’t like us either, except as a snack.”

“This can’t be. Cristina would have told us about them.”

“Then I suggest you go ask her.” I spoke up. Jasmine pressed a button on her com-link, and then talked briefly in it, and one of the women took off in the direction of the bridge.

“This ship is larger than those we came here in, how many people does it carry?” I asked.

“Still the same number as before, but as the nation started going to hell, they added sections onto the original design in order to carry some of the items that were noticed to not be on the earlier ships.”

“You wouldn’t happen to know what those might be, would you?” Loranda asked, a glimmer in her eyes.

“No, sorry but I don’t. I don’t know what you brought, or what we have with us. Now I have some more questions for you. How many people do you have here?”

“Right around eleven thousand total, and you?” I switched it back.

“I’m not sure, but I think we have about six thousand left. Where do you all live?” This Jasmine was starting to sound pretty sharp. “That little fort can’t possibly be enough for all of you.”

“True.” I told her. “But it does lead into a large underground complex.”

“Is there enough room for us as well?”

“Yes, and then some. You’d be amazed, I’m sure.”

“How about lighting, food, water, etc.?”

“It’s all there, but some of it you’d have to see for yourself.”

“How about communications?” She asked.

“We only have eight shortwave radios, and two central control antennas, of which one is here for emergency broadcast.”

“No com units?”

“They don’t work real well underground for some reason.”

“Then you must be doing something wrong. We can check it out for you, if you want.”

“We’ve checked the equipment, and outside, it works just fine. It just doesn’t within the caverns.” I explained.

“Sounds like some sort of blocking or interference.” Jasmine seemed to examine the problem, looking puzzled.

“We do have an idea, but it would be hard to explain until you’ve seen what I’d be talking about, so I won’t go

into it right now. You seem worried about the ratio of males to females, may I inquire as to why?"

"Yeah, well these jerks on the last shift decided to power down the seats with most of the men in them. Only about seven hundred are alive, leaving us with our husbands dead, and slim pickings to choose from. Almost all of the men left are already with a wife of their own."

"Welcome to the new world." Loranda told her, smiling.

It was at that time that Jasmine held up a finger in the universal "Wait a minute" hand signal, while she listened to her com unit. "Okay, thank you." She spoke into it without sub-vocalizing this time. Looking back at us, she told us what was going on. "Cristina's dead. She must have been hit while trying to gain control of the ship, and not told me about it. She bled out from two bullet holes in her chest. I'm surprised she was able to land at all."

"Sorry for your loss." I told her. "It tends to happen way too often around here, and you still don't get used to it."

"I think I'm starting to get the picture." She replied.

We discussed a few more details and ideas, and then decided it was time to get everyone ready to leave. Knowing this would take several days at least, we told Jasmine to talk to those people left on the ship, and inform them of the circumstances that were left them.

We returned the next morning bright and early, with more volunteers than I would have guessed, ready to help move people to the cavern. Loranda again came aboard with me and my guards, and we were shown to a sulking Jasmine.

"What's the matter?" Loranda asked.

"I'm about to have another mutiny on my hands."

“You have told them about the men to women ratio problem.” I stated.

“Yes, I did, and that’s why the problem. Those women that still have husbands are unwilling to share their men. This means that many women will not have any husband.”

“All right, let me talk to them.” I told her, holding my hand out in a gesture to take the microphone that was in her hand.

“Be my guest.” She handed over the microphone, pointing out the button that read “ON”.

I pressed the button and started in. “Ladies and gentlemen, this is Randal Wagner, leader of the survivors from the first two ships, one shuttle from another, and two villages of Germans from our past. You have been informed of the lack of men here, and aboard this ship as well. I understand that old ways are hard to change, I’ve had to do so recently myself. The facts are these: One, every man will have to have at least six or seven wives, those of us already established are less fortunate, stuck with ten to twelve. Number two: Any women who can’t or won’t handle this, are welcome to live out in the wilderness alone, and will not be protected from the carnivorous dinosaurs that inhabit this planet in larger numbers than us humans. Number three: the old rules of Earth no longer apply. What you consider children of fourteen years and older are now young adults. It’s the law of the jungle out here, and there’s no time to wait for those unwilling to keep up. Now, I’ve been informed that you have all received your suitcases. You will be responsible to carry your own belongings. Those of you with very small children are the exceptions, as you will carry your children,

and will have help assigned to you. Don't, I repeat, don't be rude to your help. They are volunteers from my people and are in no way bound to help you. It is of their own desire to help, that they are doing so. Now, you must do as you are told during this ship departure. Due to the roving bands of predators here, you might be told to stop, or run, which ever is appropriate. Don't hesitate, as my people won't, and that will leave you to your own abilities in hand to hand combat. I doubt you will live. I know you are used to a certain style of living. Forget it, those days are gone. It is our duty to survive as a race, and that also means we have a duty to pro-create, or to state it in simpler terms, make babies. This is the only known human civilization and if you all make it inside, we will have a total population of only seventeen thousand people. Out of that total, only a little over three thousand will be men, and that includes those as young as fourteen years of age. Everyone works here, at least for the foreseeable future, unless physically unable to do so, of which there are very few. Those of you that don't have small infants will be required to help unload this ship of nearly everything in it. It has been getting colder lately, so the faster we empty this ship, the better. I'll now hand the mike back to your captain Jasmine for further instructions." There, that ought to give these people something to think about. I thought to myself as I walked back to the entrance/exit to help with security.

We already had people set up to lead groups to empty areas. It had taken most of the night to plan which families would be sent to which empty homes. This was based on people's proficiencies and family size at the moment.

It was also based on how many small children and how much room was available for the smaller establishments. The idea was to fill the smaller villages and towns first, while placing the bulk of the youngest children in the city, which was the most protected of the communities. We had a doctor in Randalville and one in the city, so the three new doctors were each placed in another small town, leaving the smallest of them with only a med school student who didn't have time to finish her schooling. We gained two new dentists, so one stayed in Randalville, and one went to the town where the large raptor nest used to be, not far from the last German town, and spreading them out by doing so. It was also decided to put some people in the very small village that had been empty, near the "Valley of Life". The people to be moved here included some of our own people, along with some new. We wanted animal specialists, including the one veterinarian, to be nearest to the animals, and that's where they would be kept when it was done.

Even with all the new people incorporated into our society, there was still enough room in the city for another ship load of people easily. Our food production wasn't near enough yet for that large of an influx, but we would start adding soon.

The real problem with all the new people was the extensive line of single women. To fix this, we had all of the men that came from this ship stand in a long line, and had the single women start picking the man they would be with. It wasn't a perfect solution, but it was a starting point, and it would take several months of figuring each other out before

the majority of those women would settle into a stable home environment.

Only a couple of women thought to call our bluff about leaving. They did so together, and were outside all of an hour, when a herd of herbivores came close to them and scared them so bad that they begged to be allowed back in, and that they would rather “LIVE IN SIN”, than to die by getting eaten.

It had taken an entire day to make the four trips necessary to get all the personal belongings to the places assigned for those moving in. For those that where furthest out, several sturdy animal hides were used to drag the belongings behind, as there were miles to go before getting to their destinations.

During this time, I had my most trusted people cleaning out what was still in the armories. Though a bit larger, these were otherwise nearly identical to the others from the previous ships except for a half a dozen S.A.W.-2's (Squad Automatic Weapon, second generation), and a pair of 40mm grenade guns, with linked belts of ammo. The only other difference was that there was nearly three times the amount of ammo as before, and no fifty cal machine guns, or B.A.R.'s.

We only had one interruption during that first moving day, when a small herd of Brontosaurus went by, down where the first ship had crashed. They didn't really bother us, but the new people wanted to see them, so they were allowed a few minutes to watch, then it was back to work.

I guess the new people must have been cold that night, as the next morning, nearly every one of them was there

to help work, asking if they could make their first trip be a load of blankets. This was fine by me and we passed out two blankets per person, the rest were carried to a warehouse in the city and stacked to the ceiling in a corner. After that was food, tens of thousands of cases of food. It took days to move all of the food, with over eight thousand workers each day. The food was by far the bulkiest item aboard the ship and it was now on top of every building in the city. Cases were also brought into each home, to the tune of twenty cases per family.

Over the next weeks, we brought out five hundred bikes with spare tires, inner tubes, patch kits, brake pads, chain oil, and axle grease, to name a few items for the bikes. We found more hydro-electric plants, solar equipment, deep cell batteries, pallets of hardware, hand tools, and replacement handles. Two pallets of gloves, four pallets of stick matches, several whole pallets each of bar soap, shampoo, diapers (cloth) with safety pins, feminine hygiene supplies (washable), eleven thousand air mattresses-double bed size with pumps, hair bands for women, medical supplies and equipment, even four surgical tables with lamps, small wall mirrors, combs, brushes, scissors, nail clippers, tweezers, sewing supplies including ten older style sewing machines, prescription glasses and eye testing equipment. Reusable toilet wipe cloths instead of toilet paper, dish soap, laundry soap, writing paper, pens, pencils, erasers and sharpeners, how to books, four encyclopedia sets, ten entire pallets of spices, twenty pallets of table salt, two pallets of liquid smoke flavoring, ten pallets of cold medicine (non-alcoholic), pallets of socks, underwear, panties, bras, shoes boots belts

t-shirts, jeans, even a pallet of stocking caps was included. It's a wonder the ship ever got off the ground, but it did.

With all of these treasures and more, the real surprises were in the bottom of the hull. There were lathes, machining equipment, an industrial grade board planer, grinding wheels, three ton, ten ton and twenty ton jacks, two engine hoists, two dozen wheel barrows, another fork lift and a dozen pallet jacks. Drill presses with multiple kinds of bits were in abundance, table and band saws, air compressors with several nail guns and pallets of appropriate nails, along with other compressor fittings. Then there were five industrial stainless steel tables, a brake drum/disc honing machine, eight huge chains with hooks at both ends with eye loops, drums of lubricants, antifreeze, oils of all kinds, solvent cleaners and vehicles. Not many of them, but enough to do things with. There was a front end loader with back hoe, a pair of dump truck/sand layers with snow plow, a grader, a cement truck, a tracked Caterpillar with various front and rear mountings, a crane, a water truck, and a roller. The only other vehicles were a dozen dirt bikes, two military hummers/armored and two big military five ton trucks. All of these vehicles were in the same olive drab green color, but none of us cared. We now had tools to build things. Add to that the fuel trailer, and the one towed weapon they sent, an old WWII 105mm Howitzer, and we could soon make a good bid for survival as a race.

"Things just keep getting better and better now, don't they?" I asked Jake, who was standing next to me as I stood looking at a trailer with a conveyer on it, that I didn't understand.

“You know it, but what is this thing supposed to be?” He asked.

“I have no idea. In fact, there are a few things I don’t know about, like that rig over there.” I pointed across the room.

“Oh come on Randy, that’s simple. See that part over there?”

“Yeah.”

“That’s a deep fat fryer, used to fry French fries, onion rings, chicken pieces, and fish fillets.” He told me.

“Oh.”

“And that part next to it is the grill for cooking meat patties.”

“So, in other words, it’s junk!” I said disgustedly.

“What are you talking about? With that set-up and the cows on board, we can have a burger stand, just like back on Earth.” He looked perplexed at my lack of enthusiasm.

“The ever so great fast food machine that makes it easier to have an obesity problem on this planet too, not to include the clogged arteries and the heart problems associated with it.”

“Look, its one small set-up, it’s not like opening a major franchise or anything.”

“I still say we leave it and forget it. We don’t need it.” I grumbled.

“You’ve got some strange ideas, but I’ll have it put to a vote.” He informed me. This was the system put into place to make sure that nobody would have complete power over the others. This would be the first time it would be used in conjunction with one of my decisions. We spent the rest of the day looking over all of the amazing finds that were here.

“Mr. Wagner sir?” One of the ladies from the second ship came up to me, who had been working with Mark Suthers and his crew. “We found several crates of rockets that don’t fit anything we have in our inventory and a half pallet of belted .30 cal. ammo that we also have no such weapons for. Why do you suppose that is?”

“All I can think of, is that we had been getting a couple different weapons, with each new ship, and each ship sent after, has contained ammo for those weapons. Somebody back on Earth must have been keeping records of what was sent and the weapons we don’t have, are more than likely from those ships that blew up in space, or the ship that landed on that moon on the other side of this solar system.” I told her.

“That’s a good consensus. What would you like done with these munitions then?”

“Store them in this town for now, with the 105mm ammo. That gun will help keep out any unwanted guests on this side.”

“All right then, that sounds good.” She replied, walking off to go about her work.

I turned to Jake. “How hard do you think it would be to turn the stairs to the city into a smooth road for the forklifts and pallet jacks?”

“I had been thinking of that earlier, and it wouldn’t be that difficult with the tools we have here now. I know we have the wooden ramps, but they just won’t take that sort of abuse.” Jake hadn’t been using his southern drawl much lately and that made me think something was wrong, but I was unable to talk to him about it at this time, there was just too much to do.

“All right then, let’s make it a priority, it will save many backs from undue stress.”

“I’ve got just the people for it. I’ll be right back.” Jake informed me. He wasn’t kidding, he couldn’t have been gone a couple of minutes. It was long enough for me to notice a small box in the bottom of a fire extinguisher casing mounted on the wall. If I hadn’t of been wandering about with no particular goal in mind, I’d have surely missed it. I opened the glass door to the casing and picked up the box, on the underside it still read, “Captain Benington, the items you requested are in front of you”. Inside the box was a strange looking key, which I pocketed along with the box, and I then closed the casing again. It was less than ten seconds later when Jake came around the corner.

“It’s all set up and these tools here will make the job a snap.”

“How do you figure?” I asked.

“Easy. The angle of the steps we will have to deal with on the actual grade is the equivalent of 3%. After you take in the height and length of the stairway, that planer they just took behind the palisade will cut those pieces to fit as quick as you can set the angle of the blades. Oh, by the way, those blades are solid titanium, with diamond blade ends. It must have cost a real fortune to put together.”

“So how long do you think it will take to finish the job?” I started to think about where the key would fit, while trying to focus on the job at hand.

“As long as there are no serious delays, it could be done by tomorrow morning. That’s not the real problem though.”

“Okay, what is then?”

"The cave opening itself." He told me.

"Of course. The pallets are too high and wide. The fork lift won't fit either, sorry Jake. With all the excitement, I just wasn't thinking straight. Wait a minute, isn't there a jack hammer attachment for that back-hoe?"

"I think there is, now that you mention it. I'll have a crew get it started right away and I can have others start work on a new door once it's completed."

"A stronger one than we built before would be good. Now, I am going to ask you to give me some time to myself in here."

"What's up?" Jake looked concerned.

"I don't know yet, but I intend to figure it out."

"That doesn't sound like you, what's really going on?" He asked suspiciously.

"I really don't know, but I do plan to find out, and if it's too much, I'll take it to my grave. If not, you'll be the first to know." I needed to find out if we had some sort of nukes on this ship. If we did, I wasn't going to let anybody know.

"Alright, I shouldn't have judged you like that. You've always been open and honest before, this just took me by surprise. I'll be waiting when you're done."

Once he was gone, I had my guards form a line in front of the entrance to the bay. "I don't want you guys looking this direction and nobody gets in until I say different."

It took me a few minutes to figure out how to locate the key hole. It had been hidden behind one of the outlet plates and there were other possibilities I had also checked before finding what I wanted. If it hadn't of been for the clue on the box, I would have probably never have found it.

I inserted the key and heard a “click”, and then I turned toward the left, no movement. I tried right and it turned ninety degrees. I then remembered how the key looked and pushed in. The key went in the distance I figured it would. I then turned it left, turning it forty five degrees, and the wall panels started to open from the middle.

I couldn't believe my eyes. In front of me were ten pieces of equipment that could only be in a science fiction novel, yet here they were, right in front of me. These were fully contained ten foot tall mechanized body armor with robotics controls. There were several pallets of ammo for the various weapons located on each suit, in several locations. There was even a book, sealed in thick plastic that had metal letters attached to the cover stating, “OPERATIONS MANUAL”.

“Alright guys, let Jake in if he's waiting.” I called out. It took only a few seconds for him to run to my position and gasp, as he saw what was before us.

“What on Earth?” He finally found his voice. “Are those really . . . ?”

“Uh huh.” I acknowledged. “I can't figure what else they might be.”

“But we don't even know how to use them.” Jake stated. I then pointed to the operations manual. “Oh, I guess they thought of that.” I had never seen Jake so dumbfounded before. “Who will use these, these, things?”

“Well, I kind of figured we'd have to split them up at first, but then thought about it, and realized that all the tanks are over on the other side already, so we'll keep them over here and train four five person squads to use these.”

“Why not train six squads, one person per suit for each shift?” He asked.

“Notice those micro battery packs there?”

“Yeah, what about them?”

“Those are rechargers. I’m guessing that they have to be recharged each night, though I could be wrong. This tech is way above my level of knowledge, how about you?”

“Are you kidding? I’m only an old dirt farmer. What would I know about state of the art weapons systems?” He looked at me like I was crazy. I couldn’t blame him though, at the moment, I felt kind of crazy.

* * *

An hour later, Jasmine Torrance was standing there looking at the suits too.

“Well, what can you tell me about them?” I asked her.

“Not much, I only saw them one time, and that was on TV.”

“What?”

“Yeah, there was this huge riot at the white house, and the guards there were getting overrun, when these things came up out of the ground on some sort of stands, and started shooting everything in sight. They had lasers that could kill with one shot, and some bullets that exploded. I don’t know any more than that, as the camera crew was then killed in a storm of fire.”

“Things were that bad?” I asked, wanting to know more.

“Worse. Things were so bad that we almost weren’t allowed to take off. It was said that there were several more ships to use, but the government was waiting until the masses

of people died off. Something about temporary underground facilities to house them in until they could leave.”

“Any idea how much more military equipment they might be sending?”

“I really don’t know, things were getting so bad, they were using everything they had, at least to the best of my knowledge.” She hesitated. “You probably don’t know this about me, but I was only a passenger on this big tub. I don’t know very much about the goings on with respect to the ship’s crew plans.”

“Sorry.” I said. “You seemed to be in charge, so I made the assumption that you had been in a command position of some sort.”

“Nope, I was just one of the lucky ones that didn’t get killed by those creeps. Anyway, what do you have in mind for these things?”

“I’d think that the answer would be obvious. The first thing is to learn the operations manual, and then start doing some hands on training with the units themselves.”

She looked impatient before saying. “I’m asking about the duties that these will be assigned to.”

“Why, guard duty of course. They will also be useful for scouting further from this location. Is there something else you were thinking?” I asked.

“It depends.” She looked at the operations manual.

“Depends on what?”

“On whether or not those lasers can be recharged.”

Now she had my interest. “And if they can?”

“Just think how much faster it would be to bring down trees, not to mention all the labor it would save.”

“The lady’s got a point.” Jake spoke up. “Just imagine what these things could do, and how much lumber we could work with in a single day.”

“It’s certainly worth pondering.” I saw them both smile at that, then continued. “Let’s see what this book tells us first.”

“Damn it Jake.” It was now after dinner time. I had taken the operations manual, and closed the wall over the assault armor earlier, and made my rounds until dinner time. “I just can’t do that with your daughter.”

“And I say that you must. If we ever get our population back on track, then, and only then, we can go back to something similar to Earth’s old moral standards.”

“But! You just don’t understand.” I pleaded.

“Don’t I?” He asked. “I wanted her to have a full childhood, and now I have to not only treat her as an adult, but as a married adult who will shortly be having children. I’m proud that she picked you, and just think, that makes me your father-in-law.” He started to laugh.

“Oh yeah! That’s real funny. About as funny as me having children younger than my grandchildren.”

“Yes. It very well could be.” He smiled. “Now, I’ve got my own wives to attend to. Have fun.” He left my home, leaving me with a bunch of women, most of which would be considered as girls in any normal situation.

“Randy?” Gloria called. “Come to bed honey, it’s getting cold without you in here.”

What rubbish, Loranda had set up the wives sleeping arrangements, having Jessica and Silvia sleep on either side of me.

I closed the curtain/door we had just received earlier that day, keeping some of the cold wind out. I told those that were still awake, “Good night”, and then went to bed.

“Okay Silvia, move over to the middle, so I can get in.”

“Nope. Loranda said that you were to sleep in the middle, so you can climb over.”

“Suit yourself, I’ll be the one with warmth on both sides.” Even with their combined advances, I didn’t give them what they wanted.

* * *

“Oh yeah. That feels so good.” I was dreaming. “Yes honey, you know what I like.” Then I woke up abruptly, to find Loranda sitting above me, pressing against my face. Yes, I could really enjoy this. I could tell it was her because of the years of looking at her, even from this angle, with her backside in plain sight. Then I noticed something else, she was trying something new, going further than she ever had this way before.

I enjoyed the sensation for as long as I could stand it. Her lips and tongue pleasuring me in ways I hadn’t known before from her. My orgasm burst forth into her waiting mouth, but something wasn’t right. She had always removed her mouth from me, before.

I could feel her weight shift to a sitting position, which stopped me from enjoying her further, but I was still inside her warmth. How could that be? I don’t really know, but what a good feeling it was to not have her stop until I was finished . . . Wait a minute, that’s not even possible.

“Shit!” I exclaimed. “What just happened?”

“You just made love to me.” I heard Silvia’s voice from the other side of Loranda, my manhood loosing size and firmness almost immediately.

“Get off of me, both of you.” I told them, an edge of anger in my voice. “Leave me be.”

* * *

I was glad to spend the next several days going over the operations manual for the assault armor in the ship.

Not only was I disgusted at what happened that night with Loranda and Silvia, but I was angry at Loranda for what I perceived as treachery. I was so upset about the whole thing that I stayed away from home for nearly four days. When I finally went back, and the questions started, I just said I didn’t want to talk about it, and didn’t for another couple of days.

It was after breakfast on the sixth day after the happening, with everybody gone except Loranda and myself, when Loranda would no longer leave me alone about things, that I talked to her.

“We need to talk!” She said with a tone in her voice that I hadn’t heard from her more than a few times since I’d met her.

“My reply was instant. “What you did was wrong!”

“Was it?”

“Yes, it was and you know it!” I could feel anger surfacing again.

“Maybe the way I went about it wasn’t the best, but it’s time for you to realize that things aren’t like they were back on Earth.”

“Are you kidding me?” I asked. “I’m the one who busted my ass to get these people here to realize that very same thing.”

“Yet you continue to fight against that very same issue.”

“It’s not the same thing.” I tried telling her.

“Isn’t it?” She shot back. “It’s perfectly okay for a fourteen year old to work like an adult and be treated like an adult, but when someone that age is almost begging to be treated as such with you, all of the sudden you want to change the rules. Are you somehow better than the rest of these people around you?”

“Because I have morals, you mean?”

“No, because you seem to think that the very rules you make and support, aren’t rules you have to follow or deal with! Many of these people have the same moral scruples you do, but also realize the need to bypass them at this juncture of their life.”

“I do follow the rules in place here.”

“Until they don’t suit you for one reason or another, then you act like a hypocrite, and make decisions to the contrary.”

“I do not!”

“Then why won’t you work towards getting Silvia and Jessica pregnant? It’s not like it’s a real hard job to do.” She smiled wickedly.

“Those two girls . . .” I was interrupted.

“You mean women, don’t you?” She asked me rapidly.

“No, I mean girls. They are far too young to be getting pregnant.”

“Yet Jessica already has a child and Silvia is of the age for adulthood that you set as the standard.” She reminded me.

“For work purposes, yes, but not for what you’re getting at.”

“Which is?”

“Having sexual relations, which will then lead to having more children.” At this point I thought I had finally won, but should have realized it’s never that easy when dealing with women, they almost always win.

“Oh, you mean like each male having multiple wives, so more children can be produced, to keep the human presence on this planet from vanishing for a lack of males to procreate?”

“I’m telling you, it’s not the same.”

“And how is that?” She asked.

“Because these two are too young for me.” I put my arms up in exasperation and then let them drop again.

“I don’t see how that can be. Riada and Elizabeth look younger than Silvia and Jessica, by far, yet you don’t seem to have a problem with them.”

“I do have a problem with them as well, but I at least know that they are much older than they look.”

“Much? Hmmf. You mean a little, don’t you?”

“It depends on your perspective, I guess.”

“Well then, old man, my perspective is that you need to quit bellyaching, and start enjoying your poor hard job of having to try impregnating all of us unwilling and much too tender ladies, that might just snap in two, from that huge monster in your pants.” She stated, sarcasm almost dripping from her mouth, which at this time had lips pooched out in a pout.

“Very funny.”

“Uh oh, watch out. The poor man might get his little feelings hurt. We can’t have that now, can we?”

“Loranda, that’s enough.”

“Are you going to man-up now, and take care of business?”

“I’m telling you, I can’t see myself with those young gir . . . ladies.”

“Fine, then how about I make it so you can’t see who you’re with? Would that make it easier for you?”

“What? Did you get some sort of kinky thrill from that or something?”

“I just enjoyed sitting on you, and not being expected to wait for you to do your thing too. I get the best of both worlds.” She answered.

“You mean, all these years you’ve pretended to want me for more than my tongue?”

“No, it’s just nice to have a chance once in a while and I don’t have to drip all over the place afterwards either.”

“I never knew it bothered you.”

“Most of the time it didn’t, but it can get messy too.”

“I’m sorry honey.”

“Don’t be sorry, old man. I’ve still got a good thirty to forty minutes alone with you. I suggest you use them wisely.”

Chapter 17

“MR. WAGNER?”
“M ONE of the

guards was calling.

“Yes, what is it?”

“Mr. Crump wants you sir. He says he’ll meet you at the bridge in your town in fifteen minutes.”

“All right. Tell him I’ll be there.”

It had taken me nine days to fully grasp the concept behind the assault armor and another two weeks to teach the same to a couple dozen volunteers that would learn to use it.

I had discovered that this armor was capable of continuous use for an entire week of use on one charge, more if you used the laser less often. It was also a pressurized system and had auto seal technology to go with the climate control and oxygen scrubbing features. With the water reuse capability, a hundred foot distance for the laser and a small propulsion system built in, the design was capable of being used in space for ship repairs. This was some serious hardware.

Presently, there were five of us out in the snow learning the basic functions. We first got snow the evening after Loranda and I made up with each other, and it hadn't cleared up since. It didn't snow constantly, like the drench season rained, but it was always overcast and cold. The dim light made it equally dimmer in the caverns, but we could still see where we were going. The lighting fixtures we did use helped out some; at least we still had some in strategic areas.

I called to Haden Blithe, one of the volunteers, to let him know that he was to take my place for practicing his skills in the assault armor, AA's we were sometimes calling them.

After a few minutes of unbuckling, and moving armored parts to the open position, I climbed out and went to see what Jake wanted.

"Hello Jake, what's up?" I asked as I closed the distance to within a few yards.

"It's this weather we're having." He informed me. "It's killing all our crops, well, all except those few that are okay in cold weather, they are doing better. I'm certainly glad we gathered some of each for seed during the last harvests, but wish I knew how long this cold spell will last."

"I'm not sure, but that rainy season was close to a hundred and fifty days long, as was the time between drench and the snow, so I'm guessing that we can count on having snow for at least the same amount of time as the others."

"You know Randy? I didn't even think about that. I hope you're not right though, that will put a dent in that food supply we have."

"How about increasing production of those cold climate crops that we do have?" I asked.

“I can sure do it, but there’s no guarantee that things won’t get worse.”

“I’m aware of that, but I don’t know what else to do.” I looked around at the crop area nearby. “What do the Germans do each year? They obviously have a way to get through this.”

“Damn it. Sorry Randy, I didn’t even think to ask them about it. I’ll get right on it, thanks!” Off he went on his bicycle, as fast as he could go.

* * *

“Mr. Dachiem?” Jake asked when he finally arrived at the first German village, riding to Roberts’ home/office.

“Jawol Herr Crump, er ah, yes Mr. Crump.” Dachiem corrected to English. “What may I do for you?”

“I came over to talk to you about this snow, cold, and what you do about it.”

“That is very simple. We just grow a lot of tubes, and use a cold hole to store what we can. The winters here last about five months, Earth time. If I had thought of it earlier, I would have realized that this is your first winter here. My apologies for not realizing this before.”

“Fair enough, we also didn’t think to ask such a simple set of questions, which would have been beneficial to us all.” Jake thought for a second. “What are tubes, anyways?”

“Perhaps my translation is not so accurate here. I will show you.” The two of them walked across a path to another cave opening that was directly in front of the outside tunnel,

though the doorway was blocked by a hanging piece of Dino-hide, Dachiem leading the way.

“Here is our cold hole, and these . . .” He picked up a potato and a turnip. “Are some of the tubes I was referring to.” He then pointed out Rutabagas, Parsnips, and Carrots. “And these also are tubes, and we store much cabbage to get through the winter, to add variety.”

“Ah, now I understand.” Jake said. “We call them Tubers, or root crops, and this cold hole, as you call it, we call a root cellar.”

“Tubers?” Dachiem looked as though he were thinking about the word. “Yes, Tubers translates in a similar way, I can see how it could get confused in translation.”

“And root cellar?” Jake asked.

“This does not work so easily. It would be easier to translate to tuber room. The translation is valid, yet still a proper definition.”

“Fair enough, tuber room it is then.” Jake smiled. The two men talked for a couple hours after that, talking about crops, seasons, and ways to preserve different kinds of food, with those items readily available.

* * *

Later that afternoon, Jake came back to town and the first thing from his mouth was that Robert would like his daughter to come see him more often. After relaying the message, he and I talked about all sorts of ideas that the two of them had discussed, and I gave him a free hand in working on those ideas, at his leisure. Of course, with Jake,

that meant he had things being started within three minutes of walking off.

As he walked away to start his work, I got back on the bike I had been getting ready to ride as he showed up, and went to see how David Dudley was doing with his projects.

When I entered his office, Harry, David's son, was at the desk that had been built recently.

"Afternoon Harry. Is your father around?" I asked him politely.

"No, he's out by the southern cornfields, looking for a couple of missing people." I was informed. "Where are your guards? I thought they always stayed with you."

"With this underground area secured, I've been able to escape them as of late, it's nice to not have a babysitter squad once in a while." I told him.

"I'm not so sure it's secured yet. There is that dark spot where my father went looking for those two that disappeared."

"I was going to ask about that."

"That would be Darby and Summer. They haven't been seen for three days now."

"Why are they just now being looked for?"

"Darby has missed a day of work before on a couple of occasions, but he always makes it up with twice the amount of work afterwards. When Summer, his favorite lady, didn't show up for work either, then dad started having the city searched, with runners to each of the towns, too. Nothing, nobody had seen them anywhere, so now he is checking that dark area that we shy away from."

“All right, I’ll go see if I can find him, and thank you for telling me about it.”

It didn’t take me long to find the group of bikes by the corn fields, so I dismounted and turned on the flashlight I had with me, looking for boot prints to follow. Once I found them, I started following their path, which was leading into the darkest area of them all. I could see why there was extra space not being used for cropland. This area was soo dark, it was actually scary, or was that just my imagination getting the better of me? It had been a while since I had needed my rifle, so I now checked to make sure it was loaded and that I had a W.P. grenade in the M-203. I then checked the twin mini-Uzi’s, and the six inch .357 revolver I had become accustomed to carrying, and remembered that I also had two swords with me that I had started practicing with that I had taken from our family chest. I had one on my left hip attached to my belt, and the other was across my back. I figured that the day would come when we ran out of ammo, and that I needed to become proficient with bladed weapons, before I needed them for defending myself.

Having checked all my equipment, I again set off to follow the multiple footsteps in the dirt.

After only a hundred feet, the flashlight reflected off of the wall in front of me and formed into the usual lit tunnel type that were prevalent here. I decided to not waste the trip, so I took out my spare shirt from my day pack and kept it under my left foot, wiping as I walked. Shortly after doing this, I came across a fork in the tunnel, noticing that more prints were going in one direction than the other. Knowing

how Dudley works, I followed the smaller accumulation of footprints.

The tracks I followed led to an unusually sharp u-turn, and I became wearier than ever.

I must have gone close to a mile, when I came to a fork in the tunnel once again, having to choose right or left. The unusual feature of this fork was the thirty to forty degree angle involved with both sides, instead of the usual ninety degree angles that were more prevalent. The prints went right, so I did too.

I noticed a gradual left turn in the next quarter mile or so, when all of the sudden, I heard the distant sounds of gunfire ahead of me.

I forgot about my shirt as I took off running in the direction of the firefight. After only about a hundred yards, I could see the silhouettes of three or four people showing up against the lighter backdrop of the supposed end of the tunnel. It was at this point that I heard footsteps coming up from behind me, quickly.

I turned around, thinking that the other group of Dudley's patrol was coming to help, and started to say, "Come on guy . . ." I then noticed my mistake and raised my rifle at the same time I exclaimed. "Shit, alright you bastards." I was already firing into what had to be a cluster of at least a half dozen raptors and let the magazine run dry, taking down two of them. I then fired the grenade in amongst those in the tightest grouping and dropped to the floor, reaching for my mini-Uzi's as I did so. Ker-blamm! The grenade detonated, and I could here the dismayed sound of hurt raptors.

A second later, I rose up, both mini-Uzi's ready to fire, and nearly came face to face with one of them. I pulled both triggers and held them down, bullets streaming into the raptor at point blank range until I was knocked to the floor by the dying raptors charge. Teeth from its open mouth cut my arm near the shoulder like razor blades.

That raptor took two more steps before falling to the tunnel floor. I wasn't out of the woods yet though. There were two more of these monsters on their way toward me, so I reacted by aiming at the one in the lead and emptied the remainder of my Uzi clips into it.

I didn't have enough lead into that one to kill it, as it was kicking while on the ground. I couldn't worry about that now, I had the last one charging me, and no time to grab my pistol, so I drew my sword from my hip and held it in front of me as the last raptor barreled into me. I went down, the raptor impaling itself on my sword, which I had just been lucky enough to get out of the way of on my way down. Had I have been a half foot more to my right, the pommel would have easily been forced into me by the raptors weight.

Leaving the sword in the raptor, I got up, getting raked by three claws along my right leg for my efforts before I could back up out of range for further injuries. It hurt like hell, but I first had to finish the job here. I pulled out my .357 revolver and aimed it at the raptor that I had shot with the mini-Uzis, and shot it twice in the head. I shifted my aim to the raptor with my sword in it, and shot it three times in the brain pan before it stopped struggling. I had one shot left that was loaded.

I holstered the revolver and quickly exchanged magazines in the rifle, then put an anti-personnel grenade in the M-203

underneath. Next was the reloading of the mini-Uzi's and lastly the .357 magnum.

With all my firearms loaded, and no obvious enemies around, I pulled my sword out of the dead raptor and wiped it off on the raptors hide before replacing it into its scabbard.

There was still intermittent gunfire from the others, but I had to slow the bleeding from my leg and shoulder before going anywhere. Having left my spare shirt behind, I had to rip the one I was wearing into strips instead. Having bandaged myself quickly, I started toward the others after retrieving my flashlight, keeping an eye out for anymore enemies from behind. I could no longer rely on my ears, as the noise from my firefight had made it nearly impossible for me to hear all but the loudest of noises.

It had to be only a hundred yards to get to the others, but with my leg injured, and trying to watch my back, it seemed like it took forever to get within shouting distance, which I did at that point.

I received no response, so I limped several more yards and tried again. This time I saw someone turn their head and aim a flashlight at me, along with his rifle. I hadn't thought about the difference in the amount of light I was in vs. the amount they had been looking into, their eyes adjusted to a higher volume of brightness.

I clumsily aimed my light at myself for the benefit of the person trying to see me.

There was still gunfire coming from the other two members of the group I could see, but it had become more sporadic than it had been.

By the time I was only about thirty feet away, I could recognize Dudley as being one of the two still firing when a shot would present itself. Around that time, the guard that was watching me must have recognized me, for he waved me in, tapping Dudley on the left shoulder to get his attention, as shown in training. He pointed to me, and I was almost to them at this time.

I could see Dudley mouth something to me, but couldn't hear him and gave him the gesture to let him know as much. I figured something must be wrong, as the first guard lifted the barrel of his rifle at the same time Dudley gave the hand signal to drop to the ground.

I dropped quickly, not making my injuries any better, but was too late to escape the attack from behind. It was only my sword on my back that kept me from getting a chunk of my back taken from me. I would need a new scabbard soon. As I hit the deck, there was a volley of rifle fire, of which several must have hit the raptor behind me, as it dropped in its tracks. Its tracks were right over me and I had the wind knocked out of me by the weight of it falling on me.

After a couple of minutes, I could feel the weight being lifted from above me and could see boots in front of me, which was a relief. I didn't want another raptor to free me, just to eat me, for I couldn't have put up much of a fight in my position. I started pushing upward with the little strength I could muster, and between my efforts, and those of two others, I found I was once again able to rise.

Dudley carried part of my weight from my right side, as the other guards kept watch to the rear and front. I finally made it to the tunnel opening.

As we arrived, I could see that we had two others here, dead, out in front of the entrance, one man and one woman. I motioned to Dudley to help me get to the left of the entrance, with my back against the wall. He shook his head no, so I motioned again, but this time with a look of command in my eyes, which he noticed, and did as I wanted.

I grabbed another anti-personnel grenade, and put it in my lap for easy reloading, and waited nearly a minute before I had a target.

I fired a few feet in front of the raptor, what is called "Leading the target", and watched the raptors body parts go in all directions. I then loaded the other grenade, and waited.

Nothing, nothing at all for a good half hour of waiting, I then climbed back to my feet with Dudley's help. I used hand signals to let him know what I wanted him to do and though he did hesitate, he also complied.

With my right leg hurt, I sidestepped to my left, Dudley sidestepping right, back to back, into the open area of the cavern.

I didn't know what to expect as I went out there, but it wasn't what I saw. Though I had seen several raptors on the ground, dead, I didn't expect to see one alive. Even so, there on the ground was a raptor with a ruined leg, unable to get up, looking at me. I raised my rifle by a fraction for aiming purposes and gave the raptor a quick burst to the head to finish it off.

Dudley didn't seem to have any targets, and after a few minutes, waved in the other two guards. We could see the short tunnel that lead to the outside world. The two of us made short work of checking the ventilation tunnel and

calling it clear, the other two watching for danger in opposing directions. That done, it took only a few more minutes to locate the access that the raptors must have used, which I nearly closed off by firing a grenade at the opening. I say nearly, because there was still a small hole that a small child could probably climb through, but just barely. It still took nearly an hour for us to declare this whole cavern empty of live hostiles, after crushing the eggs of three nests.

By this time, my leg was hurting much worse, so I signaled to the others what I wanted them to do. I took the sword from my back and had Dudley carry it while the other two guards were to drag me behind them as they proceeded down the tunnel, around the one raptor that was the last to attack me from behind, and down to the scene of my battle with the group of raptors.

At this point we picked our steps very carefully, for none of us wanted white phosphorous on ourselves. Walking even this far was quite a challenge for me, as I had become even weaker than before, but I still had the ability to notice that the W.P. grenade had no effect on the surface of the tunnel. Once clear, I was again dragged down the tunnel, past the split, grabbing my extra shirt and putting it on, and out of the tunnel entrance.

I again had to stumble on my own pegs, to get to the bikes, of which none were missing, and was guided to the city. At this point I was able to lay down on a pallet, and was driven to Randalville to be taken care of by Dr. Akiro Takahashi.

While riding through the tunnel, I was able to wonder about why we hadn't heard from the other group of those who went to investigate the dark tunnel system, but nothing came back with a positive feeling.

Once back in town, I called for Jake to meet me at Doc's place, knowing I was headed there.

Cristy and Tamara both saw me going to Doc's on a pallet, covered in blood, and went to tell the others

Loranda met me at Doc's shortly after my arrival, most of my wives behind her, and before Jake could show up.

"Explain yourself mister." Loranda stated in as soon as she saw me.

"Not now, I have more important issues to discuss, and don't want to go over things more than once." I told all that listened.

"I want to know what happened!" She raised her voice a bit.

"Not now, I tell you. I will explain it all after I talk to Jake, and not before." I fired right back, giving no ground.

"Have you seen yourself lately old man?" She asked, exasperatedly.

"Not completely, but . . ." I stopped as Jake walked in.

"Holy shit!" He exclaimed. "What the hell happened to you this time?"

"It's just a scratch. Now, I need you to listen very carefully." My tone of voice left no room for argument. "Jake, I need you to get the best five A.A. people we've got, and send them to Dudley, pronto."

"All right, but . . ."

"No buts about it, just do it, now!" I told him.

"Okay, what do I tell them?"

"To report to Dudley, and that this is not a drill, full power suits only. Got it?" I asked.

"Yeah, I got it."

“Thank you. I knew I could rely on you.” He turned and left, running.

“Now, would you kindly explain why it is that you came back to me . . . us, all covered in blood?” Loranda asked again, looking a bit put out.

“All right.” I told them, and then started describing all that had happened, while Doc started his work on me. I finished the grizzly tale about the time he had cut the pant leg from my wound and checked to make sure of the work he had ahead of him, making sure that nothing was immediately critical.

“You are being number one customer.” Akiro told me. “You have keeping me very much busy. On Earth, I am rich man from take care of you alone.”

“Yeah. Well Doc, back on Earth, I would get hazardous duty pay and full coverage insurance.” I told him in return.

“Way you get hurt, you need it.” He smiled. “Lucky for you, my daughter marry you, and going have your baby.”

“She what?” I asked, looking over at Loranda. “Why is it I’m the last one to know this?”

“Why, whatever do you mean?” Loranda tried to sound innocent, then started laughing, all of the others present following suit.

“Okay, very funny.” Akiro said loud enough to be overheard. “Now I must get busy. This leg, it looks like it getting infected. You want laugh, you loose leg. You want leg, you let me do my work, talk long enough.” He had been poking and prying while we were all bantering and had seemingly come to a conclusion near the end of our conversation. This news stopped the laughter dead in its tracks.

“Sorry Dr. Takahashi.” Loranda looked down at my leg, noticing a discoloration starting near the wound, now that it was cleared of the dried and smeared blood. “Ladies, let’s let Randal be for now, we have work that needs doing anyway.” She then kissed me on the cheek and followed the others out.

“I wish you see me sooner.” Akiro told me after nearly a half hour of constant work. “I save leg, but I need you stay off feet for at least nine days. This infection only I see on this planet and it not make my job the easier, but have some muscle damage as well. I have put it back together to best of my ability under circumstance, but you must not strain it apart; you need bed rest and no making babies. The exertion of orgasm could be enough to tear it apart. I will check on you each day and make sure of progress. I will have you carried to your home, unless you want to stay here, no ladies or children for accidents that way.” He seemed to study me for a moment. “Better yet, you will stay here. Yes, that is best.”

“But, I thought . . .”

“No but. You staying here, final. I tell your family.”

* * *

The next eleven days went by slowly for me, much too slowly, considering all that was happening around me and the fact that Doc Takahashi insisted on those two extra days before letting me go home. Even then, he insisted that I only walk to the bathroom and back to bed. True to his word, he checked on me every single day, and warned my family not to let me become excited about anything.

It was two weeks before Jake was allowed to come over and tell me all that had happened.

“Hey there big R. How’s it goin’?” He asked me after being shown to my room.

“Doc says I can’t play yet. Something about abusing his latest work of art.”

“Yep. You do tend ta get into some fixes I reckon.” He told me playfully. It was good to hear him sounding his old self again.

Silence stretched for a few seconds.

“Well? Are you going to tell me what’s been happening, or do I have to hobble around on one leg and see things for myself?”

“Sorry Randy. I was just collectin’ my thoughts some.” He told me, much more serious now. “Let me begin by telling you that we now have a Tiger I, and two Mark IV tanks in working order. We also have enough bio-diesel to operate them on a limited basis. We have plenty of food growing, even if the selection is somewhat limited. The goats, cows, and pigs are all in that closed valley and under guard at all times. There were two hunts over the past couple of weeks, netting us enough meat for everyone to have a minimal amount of protein for a couple of days on each occasion. It looks like we will have a much larger population soon. Nearly half of the women able to conceive are pregnant and we’ve had radio contact with a ship that is orbiting the planet.”

“What else is going on?” I asked.

“Isn’t that enough?”

“You know better.” I pointed to my leg. “What else happened with those caves and caverns?”

“All right.” He sighed. “The caves spread out to four more town sized caverns, added to the one you guys found, and they’ve all been cleared and cleaned. “ He hesitated. “That’s all the good news.” He looked at me. “I guess you’ll find out the rest anyway. That other team that went on the search and rescue mission found the missing couple dead, and died themselves, parts of the bodies were scattered all over the place, minus the parts that had been eaten already, no survivors. We lost a total of twenty seven men and women by the time we cleared all of the raptors from the caverns and tunnels. The total would have been much higher if you hadn’t of had me send the armored unit when you did. I have to let you know, Harry Dudley was one of those lost in battle. David Dudley’s taking it really hard. I don’t know if he’ll snap out of it or not, but he doesn’t do much more than sit by his son’s grave.”

“If I remember correctly.” My eyes were tearing up and my voice started to crack. “His wife was one of those that died in transit.”

“Yeah, you’re right.”

“Then it’s no wonder he’s taking it hard. He’s lost everyone he left Earth with. There’s just so much death around us. Sometimes I wonder if it’s all worth the effort, yet, I have to keep on trying. If I had lost everyone close to me, I don’t know how I would feel.”

“I don’t either, but the way things are going, we both may yet find out, though I sincerely hope not.” He seemed to remember something all at once. “I nearly forgot, Dale Bailey is wiring a radio into your room today. In fact, he should be here soon. The ship’s Captain wants to talk with you.”

“Why me?” I asked.

“He wants to talk to the person in charge and as far as I know, that’s you.”

“Not for long it’s not. I’m getting too old for all of this.”

“Who would you suggest be in charge instead?”

I looked at Jake and smiled devilishly. “I know just the person for the job.”

“Oh no you don’t. I’m not even going to try to lead these people. It’s hard enough to keep the crops going and the animals living. You just forget that idea.”

“Oh come on Jake, I think you’d do a good job of it.”

“You can take that job and . . .”

“Shove it?” I asked.

“No. Give it to someone else, anyone else.”

“Sometimes I wish I could. I never intended to lead so many people. I just wanted a small group of friends and family to live with, safe and comfortable, well, as comfortable as possible, but not all of this.” I could hear a commotion at the entrance to my home. “That sounds like Dale’s voice right now.” I was saying as Riada brought Dale in to my room carrying a shortwave radio.

“Well, well. If it isn’t Mr. Wagner.” He smiled. “How does it feel to be the man of the hour?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Dale looked at Jake. “Didn’t you tell him?”

“Tell me what?” I asked.

“That you are to be the first president of the United Peoples of Jurassica. It’s what everyone is calling this planet, and you need to set up a form of government we can all live with.”

“Forget it. I don’t want it. Someone else can have that title, I don’t even like politics. That’s something that should be left on Earth, not something brought with us to corrupt the future.” I wanted to get up and storm out of the room, but knew I couldn’t.

“I wish you hadn’t said anything yet, Dale.” Jake was looking away from me. “I told you it wouldn’t go well.”

“Yeah. Well, I have a Captain Johnstone on the radio, whose expecting to talk to President Wagner, so I don’t exactly have time to pussyfoot around about things.” At that, Dale handed me the headset and turned on the microphone.

Chapter 18

“HELLO?” I LISTENED for a reply from the other end of the shortwave.

“Is this President Wagner?”

“That’s what I’m being told. Is this Captain Johnstone?”

“No Sir. I’m John Grey, the Captain’s assistant. He had to attend to a quick matter, but I hear him approaching right now, wait one.”

There was a brief pause.

“Hello?” The Captain’s voice boomed.

“Captain Johnstone?” I asked.

“That’s me. What’s this I hear about a President down there? Is this him?”

“That’s correct, but it’s not self proclaimed.” I kept things short.

“Don’t want the job eh? Can’t say as I blame ya.”

“I’ll find a way to get them to use some sense later. So, what’s on your mind?”

“Well, some jackass dumped most of my fuel before wake up, and I can only make one approach, once I enter the atmosphere. Where do you want me to land this ship?”

“Do you have a spare pilot and a shuttle?” I inquired.

“I’ve got a spare pilot, no shuttle. Jerk took off in one, and sabotaged the other. I hope he dies a slow death by himself.”

“All right, how long can you stay up there?”

“I’m not sure I understand your question.”

“Are you needing to land soon, or could you stay up there about a week?”

“We could stay up here for a year if needs be. I’m confused as to why though.”

“It will take us some time to clear you a good landing area, as long as it’s not an emergency for you to land immediately. How large is your ship?”

“It’s the first Delta Class sent this direction. It’s about two thousand feet long and five hundred feet wide. We have eight passenger levels, nine cargo levels, and we are carrying twelve thousand passengers, plus my crew, why?”

“It will take closer to two weeks to clear you a spot, are you okay with that?” I asked, considering the enormity of this new ship.

“That’ll work, but I’m confused as to why we don’t just land nearby and walk the distance to you. Are you in rough terrain?”

“Let me guess. You don’t have your sensors online, do you?”

“No, that jackass took too many vital components and all the replacements with him. Why do you ask?”

“Because, if you had your sensors online, you would know that carnivorous dinosaurs rule the planet down here.” I told him.

“Should we go to that moon in this system instead then?” He asked.

“You could, but there’s a very limited supply of oxygen production and plant life. The more people there, the sooner it could turn bad for those living there.”

“I wasn’t aware of that. We just heard a radio signal warning us away from the moon.”

“My guess is that there is a good reason for that warning.” I gave him something to think about.

“All right then, we play by your rules. We’ll keep in contact every twenty four hours.”

“Might as well get used to the difference now, we have 28hour days here. Let’s go by that, okay?”

“All right, 28 hours it is. I’ll call you then.”

“Jurassica out.” I said finally.

“Delta three out.” Was the Captain’s reply.

“Jurassica? Jake asked me. “I thought you didn’t want anything to do with all the hoopla.”

“I didn’t, but I figure that if it’s going to be shoved down my throat, I may as well make the best of it. Now, it seems our friends up there need a place to land, so how about we get those trees coming down and that other ship moved out of the way?”

“Yes Sir, Mr. President Sir.” Jake said as he saluted. I just groaned, the days were going to get much longer now.

“Dale?” I asked.

“Yes.”

“Would you please send someone to get David Dudley for me? I’ll need his help to set up a new government. He needs to get to doing something anyway.”

“Sure thing, Randy. Oh, and Randy?”

“Yes.”

“Please make this government better than the one on Earth was.”

“I’ll sure do my best. Thank you.” I told him. He nodded and walked out of my bedroom, Jake following. Just thinking about the implications of what had happened started to give me a headache.

“Riada honey? Do we have any aspirin here?”

“I will ask my father if you can have any.” She hollered back from the kitchen area, I could hear her footsteps leave the front door of our home.

I was tired of staying in bed, so I got up to go get myself something to eat and drink and found Jessica sitting in the living room.

“What do you think you’re doing?” She asked me.

“Getting something for my stomach.” I replied.

“You turn right around and get back to bed old man. I’ll get whatever it is that you think you need.”

“You call me an old man, but treat me like a child, yet you’re young enough to be my child. Now what makes you think you can boss me around like that?”

“I’m also your wife, and that means I can tell you to get back to bed, OLD MAN.” She stood her ground.

“Sometimes I just can’t wait to get a larger male population, just so I can go back to having only one bossy wife.”

“Dream on! You’ll be stuck with us all for as long as possible. NOW, get back to bed!” She told me strongly. I could see her getting up as I turned around to comply. She was just trying to have me follow Doc’s orders, after all.

* * *

After two scoldings, a mil-rat soup and orange drink for something to eat, and an almost never ending hour, David Dudley showed up to see me.

“I was told you wanted to see me.” He announced, looking like he would rather not be here.

“That’s right. I’ve been given the job of establishing a government and I’ll be needing your help to do so.”

“But . . . I don’t know anything about making a government. Why do you want my help?”

“Two heads are better than one and we can bounce ideas back and forth for the next week or two.” I informed him.

“The next week or two?” He looked at me as if he would throw up his hands in despair. “That’s not long enough to detail a government, is it?”

“I don’t see why not. My first idea was to use the original Constitution and Bill of Rights, but I think it should be harder for the government to distort the laws or change them outright.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, let me see where to start. Back on Earth, in the U.S.A., it was too easy to change the parameters of the districts so that politicians could take a majority group of people that were on one side of an issue and split them

up into smaller groups. They could then be the minority, loosing their collective power at voting time and unable to represent what they wanted.”

“I’m not sure I understand.”

“Well Dave, let’s first look at an example. Let’s say that it takes 51% of the voting congressmen (or women) to pass a bill into law. Maybe only 46% of the people want that law, so they realign the congressional boundaries to make an area that was set against this new law into four fragments, each fragment encompassed into an area that is for the proposed law. Now, instead of having three areas for the law and one opposed, you end up with four areas for the law, just not by as large of a percentage. Do this in enough areas across the country and you’ll get your 51% and pass the law that didn’t originally have enough support. This should be made illegal, and nearly, if not entirely impossible.”

“It does sound unfair. So what else would you change?”

“I’m thinking about keeping the government out of the homes and the schools, completely and forever. I can see local law enforcement intervening if absolutely necessary, but that’s as far as it goes and those situations need definite lines that aren’t crossed.”

“What about child abuse, pedophiles and wife beaters?” Dave asked me.

“Valid question, but the laws that pertain to this need to be firmly set, and let’s remember that it’s not always the wife that gets beaten. And let’s look at what a pedophile is. By our old standards, most every male here is guilty of this, just because of the age of the females. It will have to be based on being an unwanted attack by non-couples coupling, or sex

before the younger girl or boy has started puberty. Even this isn't an exact science. I knew of an eight year old on Earth that had been going through puberty for two years already, and she had sex with her boyfriends because she wanted to. She did end up pregnant by the age of nine and had a healthy baby girl. I've also heard of twenty year old women that hadn't started puberty yet and nearly the same with some men. It's not all cut and dry, so it's hard to tell. I know we have a fourteen year old guideline here for adulthood, but there are still some exceptions here. Take Jessica for example, she had a child already and is just now thirteen. Does this make me guilty of wrong doing? I don't believe so, though I still have moral issues with her being one of my wives. What is moral in this instance isn't illegal, it's just a situation that I have to deal with. Should the government be involved? Absolutely not. If somebody is having sex with a two year old, that should be against the law. I've never heard of any two year old starting puberty or making a conscious and knowledgeable decision about having sex. If I'm ever corrected on this, I'll be completely surprised."

"You started saying that it isn't always the woman that gets beaten. Are you telling me that men would get beaten too?"

"Absolutely. In our old society, the men were arrested so often, no matter who was at fault, that the women learned to take advantage of this and went to the other extreme, while many men started learning to control themselves better. Let's not even consider the fact that it became a crime to have a verbal argument with each other or that arguing could bring Child Protective Services to your home with the officers,

and they would take away your children for such a crime. Hell, with CPS, it got to the point where you could loose your kids just because you didn't have enough SNACKS in your home. It became completely ridiculous."

"And child abuse?"

"Let's first define child abuse. If spanking your child for being a brat is child abuse, then I'll have no part in it. Real child abuse shouldn't be tolerated, but punishment should be mandatory. I know some people that would argue that punishment is wrong and that you should redirect a child that isn't doing right, but those same people also seem to think that punishing the parent for several years and breaking up the family, leaving the children in foster care, well that's perfectly alright. What horse shit. Real child abuse is where the child isn't being allowed to eat on a regular basis, beating the child profusely, or breaking bones. There are still exceptions to this. If your child complains about everything they get for meals and the parents don't feed the child for a couple of days to let that child experience what hunger is, that isn't child abuse. If a teenager decides to take on their parent in a knock down drag out fight, that parent should be able to fight back, and that's not child abuse. If a parent grabs a child from life threatening danger and there is a broken bone involved, that is not child abuse. Sometimes people have to use common sense and that was nearly gone from society when we left."

"You've really been doing some thinking about this, haven't you?"

"Yes, I have. If I'm going to be forced into doing this, I'm going to do my best to do it right, or at least much better than it was done the first time, back on Earth."

“So, what else would you change?”

“Everyone would get the right to a trial by a jury of their peers, before a judge.”

“Didn’t we already have that?” Dave asked.

“It depended on what law you were perceived to have broken. Sometimes the feds would just try you before a judge and throw you to the wolves. You could also lose your property without a jury trial for many reasons.”

“How much of this do you have to get done in the week or two allotted?” Dave asked, skeptically.

“All of it, but I’m hoping to use what our forefathers gave us as the basics, with a few changes, and start from there. The largest difference I want to make is to change the 51% vote amount to a 90% amount of all voters, and not just those that show up.”

“But won’t that make it nearly impossible to make new laws?”

“Yes, that’s the whole idea. More laws mean less freedom for the people and more power for government. I feel that government should only have a very limited amount of power and should need nearly everyone to vote new laws into existence.”

“Won’t the President in office be able to do as he pleases anyways?”

“What you’re referring to, are Executive Orders, which had very definite limitations. These were abused to the point where we came to believe they were okay. Most of those orders were illegal, as per the Constitution, but the common citizen wasn’t aware of it. Awareness is an issue I also want addressed, though I’m not yet sure how to go about it.”

"It sounds to me like you already know what you plan to do and that I'm just extra baggage."

"No Dave, you have your finger on the pulse of the majority of our population and I need your input, to better know how they feel about things."

"If you say so!" Dave exclaimed, and we went on talking for several hours, stopping for the day when Loranda notified me that dinner was ready and an extra setting was ready for David.

"I thank you, really I do, but I should get back to my family, I should have been back already."

"Tell you what Dave." I told him. "You go ahead and use my bike. I won't be riding it anytime soon and it'll save you some time each day, coming and going."

"Are you sure? I've got my own at the city, I just felt like walking earlier today, so I left it behind."

"Then use mine now, and bring it back when you can, or when you feel like walking back some night."

"All right, I'll do it. Oh, and thanks, I know you're trying to help me get over my loss."

"I would never do any such a thing. You don't get over a loss like that, but maybe I might try to help you put it aside enough to continue with life." I reassured him.

"Yeah, I guess you're right. I still thank you for it."

"It's no problem, in fact, it helps me too. So, you're welcome and thank you. Now, get home to those ladies, and that baby you've got."

"You mean Harry's baby."

"No, she's your baby now. She'll need a father, and I can't think of anyone I would put before you on this."

"I guess you're right, and I'm glad I can help you in any way possible. What time tomorrow?"

"How about after lunch?"

"Okay, I'll be here." He started out of the kitchen. "See you tomorrow." He called as he left, just a hint of a smile on him.

"Well, what will I do with his dinner I made, now that you let him go?" Loranda asked me from the doorway to the bedroom.

"It seems to me that we have plenty of young ladies, some with children on the way or already here, that could use a little extra to eat." I smiled as she shook her head and left me to eat what she had brought for my dinner, a mil-rat scrambled egg patty with tuna, vegetables, and seasoning mixed together in a cheese sauce, water and a brownie to go with it.

I was finished eating, drinking the last of my water, and thinking, when I caught a glimpse of movement by the doorway. It was Kyle looking at me, with just his head showing, a big smile on his face. I waved him in and he crawled in like a big cat sneaking up on its prey, but still with that big smile, and a sparkle in his eyes.

"Got ya!" He exclaimed as he jumped to his feet at the side of my bed, near my head. I pretended to jump from the sudden movement, and then gave him a big hug.

"Daddy? Why are you always hurt?" He asked.

"Well Kyle, I have to help keep people safe from the bad dinosaurs and sometimes I get hurt doing it."

"I miss playing with you."

"I miss playing with you too."

"Then why don't you stop getting hurt?"

“Well son, it’s a dangerous world we live on. I hope I don’t get hurt anymore, but there’s no way to make sure it doesn’t happen again.”

“Why not?”

“Because I need to help keep you, your brothers and sister, your mom, and the rest of our family, safe.”

“And other families too?”

“Yes Kyle, and other families too.”

“I want to protect some families. I’ll beat up those mean old dinosaurs. I’ll punch them in the nose and make them go crying to their mommies and leave us alone.” He pretended to punch a dinosaur as he explained.

“Yes, well, with you helping to protect us, maybe I won’t get hurt for a while.”

“I won’t let them hurt you again, or I’ll kick them in the . . . private spot.” He put on what he thought was a terrifying look, nearly making me burst out laughing.

“Okay Kyle, tell daddy good night and get ready for bed.” Elizabeth intervened.

“Awe man, it’s no fair. I want to sleep next to daddy.”

“I’m sorry Kyle.” I told him. “But I’m still too hurt to have anyone sleep next to me. Maybe next week, if Doc says it’s okay, how’s that?”

“Okay, good night daddy.” He told me as I hugged him again.

“Good night Kyle. You be good, okay?”

“I will.”

He was followed by Michael and Kevin, then the ladies in my life.

Chapter 19

“AS LONG AS you take it easy, you can go back to work, light duty only.” Dr. Takahashi finally let me get out of bed. “You no run or ride bike, walk slow only, no fight a dinosaurs, okay?”

“You’re the doctor. I’m just glad to be able to move around some.”

“You be careful my son, I see you later.” He told me as he was leaving.

“All right.” I said out loud. I then grabbed a towel, some soap and shampoo, and started out of the house.

“What do you think you are doing?” Cindy asked me.

“I’m going to go get cleaned up, while most of the people are still working.” I answered her.

“Not without help you aren’t. What if your injured leg cramps up from the cold water, huh? Elizabeth and I will go with you and make sure you’re okay.”

“Doc just cleared me.”

“For light duty only, which means we will still watch you.” Elizabeth piped in.

“Great, mother goose and mother hen.” I mumbled.

“Great, a grumpy old codger who thinks he’s invincible.” Cindy shot back.

“Fine, come along then. You two may as well clean up at the same time.” I didn’t see the looks that passed between them.

I waited a minute while they both grabbed clean clothes and towels, then we descended to the pool.

It had been nine days since I first talked with Captain Johnstone, and I was feeling better, but I didn’t realize just how much better until Cindy and Elizabeth undressed to get into the water. I was so aroused that even the cold water didn’t sufficiently hide my urges.

“I swear Randal.” Cindy commented. “For an old man, you sure get up and about.”

“It does seem that he is trying to wave to us, doesn’t it?” Elizabeth just had to join in. It seems to me that we might just have to see what we can do to relieve some of that pent-up pressure you have, Randy dear.”

The two of them first teased me as they washed my body, not letting me do so myself, constantly rubbing their breasts against me. My manhood must have been cleaned at least a dozen times, then Elizabeth went in front of me and pretended to drop the soap, bending over enough for me to see all her womanly charms, and I could wait no longer.

I was sleeping with Cindy and Elizabeth about an hour later, when Jake shook me awake.

“Huh, what?” I asked, yawning and rubbing my eyes.

“I hate to wake you up, but I felt it best that you know that we have cleared a landing area for that ship up there, and the call will be coming in any time now.”

“Hmm, is it that late already?” I asked, still trying unsuccessfully to clear my head and wake up properly.

“I tell you what Randy. I’ll take the call, you go ahead and go back to sleep, I’ve never seen you so groggy before.”

“Okay Jake, thank you. I’ll see you later.” I was asleep again before he left or answered.

* * *

I was awakened next by Loranda, telling me that breakfast was ready.

“Don’t you mean dinner?” I asked.

“No, you slept through dinner and the night.” She looked amused.

“Wait a minute. What do you mean? All I remember was coming back from the pool with Elizabeth and Cindy, drinking some grape drink and going to bed.”

“That’s because Doc had the girls slip you a Mickey. He said you needed some light exercise, and then a good long sleep, as you’ve been staying up too much, working on the government stuff.”

“I’m not sure I like being put to sleep in such a fashion.”

“If you’d get enough sleep on your own, then it wouldn’t be an issue.”

“I guess you’re right. What’s for breakfast anyway?”

“I’ll give you a choice, military clam chowder, or military issue ham and eggs.”

"I'll take the ham and eggs please." I groaned.

"I kind of figured you'd choose that, considering your dislike of seafood. I'll bring it in to you or the boys will tackle you before you can eat."

"Thank you honey. Oh, would you come in here and eat with me?"

"Sure, I've got enough help in there to take care of all the children. I'll be back in a minute."

It was a little longer than a minute before she came back, but when she did; she brought the two food pouches, and a small basin of water, a washcloth, and a sliver of soap. I looked at her with confusion evident in my expression. She handed me my breakfast, placing hers on a stand with the cleaning supplies, then stepped back to the doorway and closed the piece of hide, the closest thing we had to a door.

She looked at me and smiled as she started undressing. I felt myself responding to her familiar and mature body, realizing that I missed her touch, even with the multiple wives I now had. She walked over to the stand and wet the washcloth, soaped it up, and sat next to me. She pulled down the blanket that had covered me, and started to wash my manhood, which was already waiting for her touch.

"I hear you've been busy lately. I wonder if you might still have enough energy left, to use a little on a poor old lonely woman."

"I think I can manage to spare some, seeing as how you did give me a good reason to want to." I replied teasingly.

"Oh, really? And what good reason might that be?"

"How about all those years of being a good wife and the fact that I just love your body?"

“I only asked for one good reason. Since you gave me two, I have a little something extra for you too.” At that point, she leaned down and took me in her mouth. I only just remembered her rinsing me off first, as an afterthought.

Loranda knows me too well sometimes. She took me to the farthest point I could go, without exploding, then stopped and climbed on top of me, sinking my hardness all the way into her pubic mound, knowing exactly how to move to give us both a large amount of pleasure. She climaxed three times before letting me do the same, then being playful and riding me more, until I let myself relax. At this time she lay on me, her full breasts pressed against my chest, our combined love juices running out of her, over my now soft member, to then drip to the bed.

“I’m sorry honey.” She told me. “I’m afraid I’ve just made a mess where I had cleaned you.”

I ran my hands from her lower back, down to hold her derriere and told her. “I think we both made quite the mess here together.”

We both laughed quietly at each other and lay there, covered with a blanket for several minutes before cleaning up as much as possible, and finally ate our food.

After eating, I once again fell asleep, waking later to Jessica working on getting me aroused. This was the hardest for me to deal with, considering how small her frame was, how young she was, and the tender young look of her face. I had to remind myself that she already had one child and even with her small A-cup breasts, she had been breast-feeding him as any other mom would. Only a

few minutes after we finished, her baby boy started crying, wanting her attention.

I got up, cleaned up a bit, put on some clothes, and went to use the restroom. I then grabbed my kit to go take a bath in the pool, accompanied by Elizabeth, which is where Jake found me.

I had seen him approaching ever since he crossed over the bridge and just waited on him, seeing he wasn't in a hurry.

"Morning Randal, Elizabeth."

"Good morning Mr. Crump." Elizabeth greeted him.

"Jake." I said. "What's going on?"

"I thought I'd tell you the good and bad news that you missed yesterday and this morning."

"Okay, let's start with the bad news first."

"That's fine with me." I could tell that he felt uncomfortable with Elizabeth's nudity, even though the water was up to her waist. "We lost one of the foragers and one of the guards this morning at the edge of the clearing by the main entrance. That's the bad news, except that the attacks were by Pterodactyls, which had left us alone up to now. The good news is that we now have both Tiger's and three Mark IV's running, with two more nearing completion." He took a moment, still fixated with Elizabeth's breasts. "Actually, that's part of the good news. The ship waiting for a place to land is due to land today, but there's another ship orbiting the planet, that showed up last night while you were dead to the world. This new ship is smaller, like the one we came here in, and lost four thousand people due to sabotage, but the ship is intact, and

both pilots are alive. That gives us about 17,000-18,000 more people arriving from those two ships. This will nearly fill up all our towns, and most of the city too. It also looks like we will have sheep and horses added to our available livestock options. The landing room for the smaller ship should only take a couple days.”

“If it’s no larger than our ship was.” I butted in. “Then why not just land it in front of the palisade by the main gate? There’s plenty of room for it.”

“It will block line of sight for the guards.”

“Then take the two Tigers, and a couple of the Panzers, and put them on guard duty for the area as support.” I explained.

“Now see Randal, that’s why I come to you. You’ve always got simple solutions to solve our problems.”

“Not always, but glad I could help. Anything else?”

“Yeah, there is one other issue to bring up. Some of the people want to start making alcohol and I think a few have already done so. What do you want to do about it?” Jake braced for my answer.

“Nothing. As long as it’s not someone who’s pregnant, on guard duty, or someone working with machinery, I don’t think others have any say-so in the matter, as long as they don’t get violent because of it.”

“All right, I’ll note the exceptions and let it go.”

“That’s best, I think, as long as it isn’t taking from our food and fuel supplies, that is.”

“I’m glad you brought that up, I had forgot to tell you, the large ship is carrying a sugar cane crop, which we can grow, as well as bamboo.”

“Good, we can certainly find advantages with those two items being harvested. Are you sure you got everything now?” I asked.

“I hope so. So much is happening so quickly, I feel like my head is spinning.”

“Welcome to my world on a normal day.” I told him.

“Yeah well, it’s going to get worse with the influx of extra people, you watch.” He smiled and waved, his eyes lingering again on Elizabeth’s breasts. “Good bye you two, I’ll see you around later.” He shook his head.

We both waved in return before he turned and left.

“Randy?”

“Yes Elizabeth?”

“Do you think there’s something wrong with my breasts?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, it’s like Jake couldn’t keep his eyes off of them. Are they ugly?”

“No, no, not at all. I just don’t think he’s used to a young lady having a pair that are quite so large, yet still very firm. You have very nice breasts.” I hadn’t been ready to deal with a young ladies’ insecurity issues, and couldn’t figure why they existed with this circumstance.

“Are you sure? I get looks from the women around me sometimes too, and they are always getting in the way of activities.”

“Some women are built differently, that’s all. Don’t worry about it.” I did worry about it though, she had only had a D-cup when we arrived, and she could now find no bras that would fit her. If they didn’t stop growing soon, she was going to have serious back problems when she got older.

“How about we get done here and go back. I’m starting to get too cold and it looks like we will soon have a lot of company.”

“Okay.” She said as she started grabbing a towel to dry off with.

* * *

It was only a little over an hour later when I was informed that the larger ship had just entered the atmosphere and would be landing shortly, the other ship ready to enter an hour behind the first.

I had already sent runners on bicycles to gather all available work crews and guards to assemble at Randalville and the city, with roughly half at each staging area. Now it was time to be ready to work, and work hard.

I told Doc what was happening, and was informed that I could be on guard duty, as long as I stayed inside the palisade walls.

I decided to wait at the entrance to the palisade area with most of the guards. The work crews were staying within the cavern until they were needed.

By the time I walked to the entrance, I had only a few minutes to wait before someone with better eyes than mine pointed to a speck in the sky.

As we watched, that speck became an ever larger form until it actually cast a shadow over us as it was landing, the noise so loud that nearly everyone covered their ears.

As soon as the engines shut down, all ten of the Assault Armored guards reported to their posts in pairs, the two

armored hummers being used as support with their machine guns.

I was expecting a side door to open like they did on the other ships, but a large bay door opened near the ground instead, revealing several vehicles in the background.

A handful of people came down the ramp as more of our guards took defensive positions to protect them as they approached the gate.

"Captain Richard Johnstone, I presume." I held my hand out to the man who was the obvious leader of this small unit.

"I guess that would make you either President Randal Wagner, or Jake Crump." He replied.

"Correct the first time. Welcome to Jurassica. As you can see, I've got a large contingent of guards here for protection. How about getting your people ready to move, and then come with me, I'll show you around. Do you know how to work an electric pallet jack that you stand on and control? They're called pallet riders."

"No, I'm afraid not. Why?" He asked.

"Then there will only be room for you to bring three of your people with you, as I will have to supply a driver for you."

"Fair enough. Give me a moment, will you?" I stepped back a few feet.

A minute later, he had three of his crew joined me and we walked to the tunnel that leads to the city.

I had had the forethought to stage two pallet riders at this point, with pallets already on them, and these pallets had been modified with a floor and handrails, and could each hold four people on them.

“You’ll want to hold on tight at all times, these are easy to fall off of.” I announced to the four of them.

“I’m already impressed with this place, I can’t wait to see the rest of it.” The captain replied.

“All right then, hold on.” One of my guards drove the pallet rider, while I stayed in the back with the other three.

The residents had been working on several projects during these last few weeks, one of which was to make it easier to transport supplies and people from one place to another. This happened to include new ramps that had a less steep angle to them, making them more accessible to the pallet riders and fork lifts.

I showed the captain and his men all but two of the towns, those being too steep of a drive for our riders to climb, and informed them that if not for my bad leg, I would have shown them too. If they wanted, I could find them someone to show those towns, but the offer was declined.

“I can’t believe this place.” Captain Johnstone exclaimed after the tour was over. “I had no idea that such a place would exist on a planet ruled by dinosaurs. I figured maybe a large cavern series that had to be refined to suit habitation, not this.”

“I was quite surprised myself.” I added.

“I’m guessing that you’ll want my people in the empty towns first, then add to the city.”

“Actually, there will be both ships people to house, so I thought we’d let people help make the decision based upon size of town they want to live in. How’s that sound?”

“Sounds fair enough, we’ll just have to see how it works out.”

“We were near the city when I was informed that a Captain Alan Front had just landed his ship and the security patrols were out in full force. I thanked the runner, and tried to excuse myself from Captain Johnstone, to meet Captain Front.

“No need Mr. Wagner, we’ll come with you. I’ve talked to him on the radio, but haven’t yet met him, it would be my pleasure.”

“All right then, shall we?” I asked, getting back into the back of the pallet platform, receiving a nod in response to my question.

It took only a few minutes to arrive at the palisade gate, hearing the winding down of engines, waiting only a minute for the side door to open. A group of nine people appeared at the elevator platform, which had come down into position as the engines were shutting off, now ready for use.

We watched those nine members of the ship ride the elevator down, and trample through the snow toward the gate, so Captain Johnstone and I came forward to meet them, shaking hands and going through introductions.

Captain Front and one of his guards came with Captain Johnstone and one of his, in the passenger compartment of the pallet rider for another tour of our civilized area, again minus the two towns.

When we were again finished, both captains merrily discussing the potential of this place, I invited the two of them to my home for dinner. Both of them sent their extra guards and personnel back to their ships to start unloading the ships.

When we arrived at Randalville, we could see that people were now starting to exit the ship, looking around

at their new environment, and being ushered into lines for processing, for housing purposes.

The three of us went to my home and talked for a few hours while dinner was prepared. Loranda and Cindy worked together to work up something good and recognizable, yet with the addition of Jurassica cuisine, to add new flavor.

Jessica and Elizabeth were also there, helping when needed to go get something on occasion, while taking care of Jessica's and Loranda's babies. Captain Johnstone commented on this.

"How many servants do you have?" He asked.

"None. These are some of my wives." They had earlier been introduced by name, not position in the family.

"Some of your wives?" Asked Captain Front, just ahead of Captain Johnstone.

"Yes, some of them. I have ten of them to pester me." I replied.

"But, two of them look underage, and the third just legal." Captain Front again beat out Captain Johnstone for timing.

"Things are different here than back on Earth. We have a large difference in male and female population, and the age of adults is fourteen, at least until we know that we won't die out, due to a lack of population."

"But I have a nearly equal number of men to women on my ship." Announced Captain Johnstone. "At least it's about 60/40, in favor of women."

"How about you Captain Front?" I asked.

"Closer to two to one, again with more women. Why?"

"It seems to always end up that way. The men usually do the hardest labor and the most dangerous jobs, leading to

increasing percentages of women over men. We didn't know if we would ever have any more ships arrive, so we had to get drastic. Even with the influx of your peoples, the ratio will even out about five to one, maybe a little less. This isn't something we started off doing, it was only recently that we started this program, a few months ago maybe." I waved over Jessica to where we were talking. "Jessica, please tell these men how excited I was to gain you and the others as wives, with the exception of Loranda that is."

"Excited?" She looked perturbed. "That's not what I'd call it. You wouldn't make love to us until Loranda helped trick you into it."

"Well, how old are you? You don't look old enough to be with an old man." Captain Johnstone inquired.

"I'm thirteen by Earth time and I'm old enough that I've had a baby by another man who is dead already. I may not look old enough to you, but I've already been through enough to know what must be done. You see, there are groups of girls much younger than me that are trying to have children and it's of our own free will. We already know the possibilities involved with young age pregnancies as well."

"So you are telling us that Mr. Wagner here didn't want you all as wives?" Captain Johnstone asked in disbelief.

"That's an understatement. He still doesn't like to give most of us any attention, but he's learning that it does no good to fight it. It's become more of a job for procreation than just having fun. Believe me, it's hard to get his attention once a week, and his first wife, Loranda, has only been with him twice in several weeks. He keeps getting himself hurt so he can have time off from his husbandly duties."

“That doesn’t sound like any man I’ve ever heard of.” Captain Front proclaimed. “How about you?” He asked of Captain Johnstone.

“Maybe the age situation, but not the rest.”

“Trust me guys.” I told them. “It’s not as much fun at my age as I thought it would be when I was younger. Jessica here said it strait when she said it’s my duty to procreate and I’ve gained some of my wives just because of who I am, which hardly seems fair to me.”

“Okay.” Captain Front asked. “How many women do you think will be with each man from our ships?”

“By the numbers you gave me and considering the amount of extra females available here already, I’m going to say that it will probably be a three to one ratio.”

“What happened to five to one, like you said earlier?” Captain Front asked.

“I’m not going to take families apart just because more people arrive. If a female doesn’t like it where she’s at, she can leave and announce that she is looking for another mate. This happens quite often, along with losing men for one reason or another, which makes all of his women available after they are finished mourning his death.”

“Meaning that we could conceivably gain more wives with time?” Captain Johnstone asked.

“Yes, but don’t curse yourself so quickly. Try two or three for a while and then come tell me you want five or six. I think you’ll find it very demanding with two or three.”

“Then why don’t you have some leave you?” Captain Front asked.

“It’s not up to me really. If a woman says she loves you, who are you to disagree? I’ve already tried it and it doesn’t work at all.”

“What if your original wife won’t allow it to happen with you?” Captain Johnstone asked.

Jessica called to Loranda, who came over to find out why she was called. Jessica informed her of Captain Johnstone’s question and then sat on my lap, rubbing herself against me seductively.

“One of the reasons is right there, what Jessica is doing to Randal. It’s funny to watch a man who used to think he knew about women, all of a sudden realize that he doesn’t know near as much as he thought he did. Another reason is that men want sex too often and without any romance to it most of the time. Now I can pick my time with him and it’s all the more special because he isn’t trying to hurry up and get his relief, to then roll over and go to sleep, leaving me wanting for more. When he’s getting all he can handle, I get to spend quality time with him, in a more relaxed state of being. As a bonus, I have all these extra helpers to clean, cook, take care of kids, stoking the fire, collecting wood or food items, and on cold nights, we snuggle up next to each other and Randal, staying much warmer.” She looked into the kitchen. “Now, if you gentlemen will excuse me, I’m trying to cook some food for all of us.” She then turned and went into the kitchen.

“That’s quite a wife you have there.” Captain Johnstone told me.

“I think they all are, but you’re right, Loranda is truly a special lady. I think that most of the women that came

here with your people will learn the benefits of this kind of lifestyle, as well as the necessity behind it all. Most, if not all of them, will probably be on board, once they have enough time to think about it, and talk to others that are already living this way. It may not always be like this, but for now, it's what we've got."

"Do you have any ideas as to how you will get this system to start working with all of us new people?" Captain Front asked.

"Yes, as a matter of fact, I do. I have had organizers set up at each staging sight, to find out family size, gender of members, and town size preference. They will then assign homes to those families with men in them, while asking single women with and without children, to please wait until things can be dealt with properly. When every one of the men has a home, then the single women will be asked if there is any particular man they want to live with, after the situation is explained to all, and we will see what happens."

"What about those women that are divorced, or widowed?" Captain Front asked his next question.

I looked at both men. "We don't have those distinctions here, forget all of the politically correct mish-mosh, we don't use it. You are either married, or single, too young or old enough, able or unable, etc."

"What if some women aren't taken in?" Front wanted clarification.

"Then they will be brought to the city and listed as available, living in the city until someone does ask for them that they are willing to try things out with."

“Okay. At first it seemed like you were going to force people to live with those they don’t want to live with. It seems you have things under control.”

“Thank you very much, now if you’ll excuse me for a moment, I’ve got to go to the restroom.” As soon as I said this, Jessica jumped off my lap, and I walked to the back room that was being used for such purposes.

* * *

Cindy and Loranda apparently thought they had to cook a feast. It’s true that with the two captains’ families coming for dinner, we would have thirteen more people over for the meal, even if Captain Johnstone’s two year old granddaughter wouldn’t eat much, but it looked like there would be twice as much food as needed.

We all sat around the extended living area, the kids at the table, except for the two year old Lila, and a few of us were into the kitchen area. There were right at thirty of us together that night, and it was clear that some of our ways would take time to adjust to, especially for Alan Front and his family. His fifteen year old son Dennis, and fourteen year old daughter Belle, just found out that they are considered adults now, and with that comes a list of responsibilities. Chelsea, his twelve year old daughter, was already maturing physically and was likely to join one of the many young lady groups that are working to help save the human race. His wife Barbara wasn’t pleased to hear about the ratio of women to men or the way we came up with to deal with it. She also didn’t want her little children doing things as

adults. The only thing she did like about it at all was the thought of the extra help with the chores.

These people hadn't endured all the hardships that the rest of us had and I could tell that this wasn't going to be an easy transition for many of them.

In this case, luck was the major factor that made things easier.

After dinner, I went with them to the city to see how things were going and ran into David Dudley, who had a growing list of single ladies presently in the city, having no male to live with.

Dudley handed me the list, which was at 1803 ladies, and I shoved it to the captains and their wives. While Alan and his wife Barbara were looking through all the pages, Barbara told him to stop and go back to the previous page. He did so and Barbara's mouth nearly dropped to the floor, then her eyes shone with excitement. She pointed to a name and asked Dudley where this woman was at, so he gave her directions to the milling group of women. Leaving him the list, she took off to where she had been told while the rest of us followed to watch this new turn of events.

When she arrived, she started looking around, which went on for several minutes before she decided to call out the other woman's name. "Glenda? Glenda Shopshire? Are you in here?"

A young lady spoke up. "Two ladies and some children just went to use the bathroom a few minutes ago and one of them said her name was Glenda while we were talking. Sorry, but I didn't get a last name. They should be back any minute."

“Thank you young lady, I guess I’ll just have to wait.”

There were women and children walking all around the area, so it was still a shock when out of the crowd came the call. “Barbara? Barbara Henley. Is that you?” A lady came toward us, another woman next to her.

“Glenda! I just knew it was you on that list. I haven’t seen you in what? Fifteen years now. You’re looking good. How have you been?”

Barbara and Glenda talked excitedly for a few minutes. Afterwards, Barbara introduced her husband and children to Glenda, and vice versa, then finding out that Glenda’s husband didn’t make the trip alive. He had died en route for unknown reasons, and no, it was not sabotage.

Dudley went about marking information in his paperwork whenever a runner would appear and tell it to him.

The subject of multiple wives came up between the two old friends and Barbara leaned close and whispered softly. Both ladies laughed for a minute, Glenda nodding her head, and they both approached Alan.

“Alan honey?” Barbara asked.

“Yes.” He answered, getting the impression that something was going to happen.

“Glenda and I were best friends in high school, actually since second grade. Her husband died on the way here, and I just can’t let her and her children live by themselves. Can she come live with us and be your other wife?”

Now Alan’s jaw was the one to hit the floor. Not an hour ago, she was dead set against the idea, and now she was asking him to jump in head first.

“It’s up to you honey. Whichever you choose.” He made sure to stay neutral in this, even though he did find Glenda to be very attractive. He wondered how many of her children would live with them and how many would “become adults” due to their ages.

“Okay then.” Barbara stated. “We’ll all grab our bags and go together to that home they’re holding for us. Come on guys, let’s go.” The lady that had been with Glenda told her goodbye, and how lucky she was before finding her way back into the crowd.

Captain Johnstone’s wife Amanda just stood there, not trusting herself to speak, and watching the Front family, plus six, leave for their new home.

“Dearest? You ought to close your mouth soon you don’t want to catch flies in it.” Captain Johnstone laughed, looking at the expression on her face, one of total shock.

“I can’t believe what I just witnessed.” Amanda snapped out of it a bit.” We were just agreeing about how stupid this whole multiple wives thing was and now her husband has another wife less than one hour later. I don’t understand.”

Richard Johnstone looked at his wife and said. “We’re not in Kansas anymore.”

“Would you cut it out with the quotes already?” She asked him, not sounding at all like a question.

“Sorry mom.” Their daughter Samantha told her. “But you really did look like you swallowed a toad.” “I guess the next thing that will happen is that you’ll run off and find some guy, or sign up here and wait for one, right?”

"Thanks mom." Richard's daughter Samantha stated enthusiastically. "If you hadn't of brought it up, I might never of thought of it. I guess I should."

"My husband laughs at me and now my little girl wants to abandon me."

"Mom! I'm twenty three years old and have a son of my own. I'm no longer a little girl."

"You'll always be my little girl." Amanda nearly cried.

"Fantastic, I'll never be a woman in my own mom's eyes."

Dudley walked up to me. "Come morning, the young men will be down here looking for extra wives to bring home. What do you want me to do about it?"

"I don't plan to do anything about it. The young men and the ladies here can make their own decisions for themselves."

"Isn't that a hard way to look at things, Mr. Wagner?" Amanda asked tensely.

"No offense, but this is a hard world and hard times. People are going to have to make some hard decisions and learn hard lessons if humanity is to survive here."

"Do you realize that some of the girls here are too young to be starting families? Let alone make the kind of decisions in front of them?" She snapped at me.

"Mrs. Johnstone." I dove right back in. "If I've learned three things since coming here, they are one: Sometimes life isn't fair, period. Two: people are able to do much more than they think, or others think in this case. And three: people are resilient, but sometimes have to fall down occasionally when learning to walk. Now I realize that you just arrived,

and haven't seen or dealt with the horrors that the rest of us have, and I hope you don't have to, but the reality is this. We live on a planet where dinosaurs rule, and people are going to die on a regular basis. This isn't how we want it, but it's the way it is, so we'll do the best we can to survive. If this means that our young people grow up sooner than we would like, then so be it. If you don't think you can live with the laws we have here, by the end of the week, then by all means, gather those of like mind and find somewhere else to live."

"Richard? Did you hear how he just talked to me?"

"Yes honey, I did." He smiled at me. "What would you have me do about it?"

"Well, make him apologize to me."

"Surely honey, he is just telling you like it is. Give this place a week and if you still want to leave, then we can discuss living out in the wild with the nice little dinosaurs, and build us a normal wood frame house like we had on Earth," He told her.

"You're mocking me? I'm your wife."

"And I love you for it, but you've got to realize that this is just how things are here and this is the best place I know of on the whole planet."

"It won't be for long! I'll get enough like minded people together and vote this man and his laws out and bring proper laws back to these poor misguided people." She lifted her head, turned around, and started off in the opposite direction from their home.

"You're going the wrong way." I called, but she kept walking anyway.

"I'm sorry about that Mr. Wagner, she gets awful stubborn and is used to getting her way." Captain Johnstone apologized.

"It's no problem, but you might want to make sure she gets a good night's sleep, tomorrow will be a long day of work for everyone." I shook my head as he took off after her.

"Mr. Wagner?" Samantha asked. "Aren't you worried about my mom getting you voted out from being in charge here?"

"No, I'm not. In fact, it would be a relief that you can't imagine, if she did. That would let me take my family and friends, and leave this place to go obtain some peace and quiet, like I originally thought I was doing."

"Mr. Wagner? Do you have room for two more people at your home?"

"I'm sure we could find room for you somewhere. Why?"

"I love my mom and all, but I also want my son to have a chance at life and I know my mom will do all she can to change what you've got here. I want to go with you and your group, if the time comes."

"I think you should talk with your parents about this first. Don't you?"

"I do believe you were just talking about people here making their own decisions, weren't you?"

"Yes, but you should . . ."

"No buts about it." She cut me off. "I've made my decision." She looked behind her and we both noticed her mom and dad walking back, only a few yards away.

"Mom, dad!" She spoke a little louder, so they could hear her. "Brent and I are going to go live with Mr. Wagner."

She was bringing her voice down as her parents closed the distance.

“What?” Exclaimed her mom. “You’ll do no such thing young lady.”

“I’m not debating with you mother, I’m telling you.”

“This is all your fault, you pervert.” Amanda told me in a voice full of accusation.

“No mother, he didn’t do anything. I made this decision on my own and for my own reasons. Sometimes you seem to think you can lord it over everybody, well you can’t. Just because you don’t like something the way it is, doesn’t make your opinion the right one for everybody. You need to learn that you don’t know it all.”

“How dare you speak to me like that? I’ll, I’ll.”

“You’ll what mom? Call C.P.S. and have Brent taken away from me, like the last time I disagreed with you? Go ahead. For some reason or other, I don’t think it will work this time. No lying sob stories going to bring down the wrath of big brother here. I still love you, and do thank you for putting Brent and I on your list, but it’s time to cut the cord and let me be myself.”

Amanda was in tears and didn’t say anything. Her husband started walking her to their home, their son, his wife, and their two young daughters following behind.

“Are you sure this is what you want?” I asked her.

“It’s what I’ve wanted for six years now, maybe more. Why do you ask?”

“I just don’t want you to make any mistakes.”

“I’m human aren’t I? I’m bound to make several mistakes. This just isn’t one of them.”

"All right then, let's go."

"Do you really think my mom will work tomorrow?"

"Unless she has a real good reason why she can't."

"She's the captain's wife. Isn't that reason enough?"

"Not even close." I told her.

"Do you work all the time?"

"Yes, I do. Right now I'm on light duty, due to some injuries I sustained in combat, but I usually work right along side the others."

"I kind of figured that. You just had that look about you." She stepped onto the pallet, grabbing the handle and her son, while sitting down. "I've got him good and steady. Let's go now please."

It was a quiet trip back to Randalville, and it was getting late, even for me.

I walked Samantha and her son to the house, and let Loranda know that Samantha had decided to stay with us, and that we would find her a place to stay. I also informed her that I had to see Jake before I could go to bed; I'd be back in a few minutes.

* * *

"What do you mean by that?" Jake asked.

"Exactly what it sounds like. I don't know how much longer we've got, but I don't think it'll be long enough."

"Are you sure about this? I mean, we've done so much already. Can it really end like you say it can?"

"Not only can it, but it probably will. Here's what I want you to do." I then explained things in detail.

“Some of this seems kind of drastic, but I do understand why it’s necessary. I’ll see to it that it happens right away.”

* * *

“It’s about time you came home. I don’t think you’ve been away this long, of your own volition, in several months. Wait a minute, you have a look of frustration about you. What’s going on?” Loranda asked me when I came through the door.

“It’s best that I speak to you about it when we are completely alone, maybe tomorrow after breakfast, down by the pool, or on the bridge.” I told her.

“This sounds serious. Are you sure it can wait?”

“It’ll have to. You and Jake are the only ones that will know for quite some time, maybe Jakes first wife, but no others.”

“All right Mr. Mysterious. We’ll talk tomorrow morning. By the way, I think Samantha has a crush on you.”

“No, no more wives. I can’t deal with the ones I have already.”

“That reminds me. Riada and Silvia are waiting for you in bed.”

“Not tonight. I’ve got way too much to think about.”

“Don’t tell me, tell them. They’ve been bothering me about when you’d be home all night.”

“I think I’ll go sleep by the pool.” I tried to get out of it.

“No you don’t mister! You go march your old ass in there and confront your problems like a man.”

* * *

“What do you mean I have to go pick food with the others?” Amanda demanded.

“Did you eat breakfast?” Jake asked.

“Of course I did. What’s that got to do with it?”

“If you plan to eat, then you must also plan to help with the gathering.” He explained.

“Like hell I will. My husband is the captain of the large ship that landed yesterday.”

“Sorry ma’am, that has nothing to do with getting the work done. I have my orders.”

“Yeah? Well here’s another one. Leave me alone!”

“If that’s your decision, then you must know that you will receive no more food to eat.”

“How dare you! Get out of here.”

“Very well then. You’ve been warned.” Jake walked off.

* * *

Work on unloading the ships was progressing well that day and I was very pleased with all that was found in the ships, mostly with the vehicles in the larger ship. There were half a dozen heavy military trucks, three of which had utility trailers, a fourth with a medical trailer, and two that had towed artillery pieces. Additionally, there were a dozen motorcycles, two more hummers, two L.A.V.’s, and two early model M1 Abrams tanks. Along with all the military equipment were several tractors or various sorts, two dump trucks, and a large number of spare parts, liquids, and

other maintenance materials. This ship had a sliding door/secret compartment like the other large ship, but contained additional weapons and ammo instead of the Assault Armor the previous ship carried. The weapons included mortars, heavy machine guns, rocket launchers, grenade guns, and two 20mm Gatling guns, which came with ten pallets of ammo. The real prize this time was a pair of modified scout helicopters, each armed with rockets and machine guns.

I was watching more equipment being offloaded when Captain Johnstone approached me, he didn't look happy.

"Mr. Wagner? What's this about my wife not eating or having her luggage?"

"Exactly what you mentioned. She feels like she's too good to work with the rest of us, so she can do without those things that the rest of us get."

"It's not as simple as that, and you know it." He told me.

"Actually, I don't know it. There are about sixty some odd other people who are doing and going through the same thing. I've moved all the others to a central location so they can be watched. Out of respect for you, I have let her stay put."

"Why can't she have her own luggage?" He asked.

"She can have it, anytime she wants, she just has to carry it herself like you and everyone else has, except for the small children."

"I didn't carry my luggage."

"Then it's still on your ship waiting for you." I informed him.

"I don't see you carrying the boxes of things off the ship, why not?"

“For the same reason I couldn’t show you the other two towns yesterday, Mr. Johnstone. I am under doctors orders to not do any real physical work, or I’d be carrying boxes, or whatever needed doing.” I lifted my pants leg. “This is still healing from an encounter with a Utah raptor that wasn’t quite dead yet, which was one of many I helped fight that day, and I’ve been near death on two separate occasions from other combats, trying to make this place as safe as it is today. I’ve watched and heard people die doing the same, yet all of us are still doing what we can to help others. We’ve earned the right to rest if we want to and we keep working anyway. If we didn’t, we would starve, get killed, or watch others die as they got here. Would you like me to pull my people off the work details, and guard duty, to let your people fend for themselves?”

“Honestly, I haven’t seen any dinosaurs here yet. I only have your word that they exist.” He smirked.

“Fair enough. I’ll let you run your people alone tomorrow, and I’ll keep my people out of the way.”

“I didn’t mean it like that.” He gasped.

“I did. You’ll find that I don’t have time or patience for little games like this. We’ll finish what we’re doing tonight and stop.” I walked away.

I found Jake and informed him of what I wanted offloaded during the remainder of the day, and where I wanted it stored.

* * *

After dinner, I again received a visit from Mr. Johnstone.

"I want to know the reason for you having armed guards watching my cave." Johnstone sounded furious.

"Your wife was caught trying to steal food that she didn't have a right to." I told him.

"She has to be able to eat. What did you expect her to do?"

"I expect her to earn her food, like everyone else does."

"Look here, we brought plenty of food with us on that ship, and she's entitled to it."

"To some of it, yes, and if she wants to go carry a box of it in, I'm sure she could have one of the meals contained inside, but I didn't see her make an effort in any way, except to steal what was planted some time ago."

"How is she supposed to work if she doesn't eat first?" He asked.

"That's her problem, but she won't die of hunger by lunch tomorrow, even if she does work."

"So you'll let her eat at lunch tomorrow?"

"Sure I will, as long as she has earned it." I told him.

"And if she doesn't?" He didn't look pleased.

"Then she won't eat then either. That's just the way it is."

"You're a hard man Mr. Wagner."

"Hard times." I replied. Then he turned and left.

"I can't believe he didn't even ask about us." Samantha stated from around the corner.

"I'm sure his mind was on other issues right then, or he probably would have." I told her, trying to ease the moment.

"I don't think so. He knows mom cheated on him when I was conceived, and that I'm not really his daughter, though

I've never known my real father. He and I have always had a strained relationship."

"That's a real shame, but it's his loss. I think he should be proud to call you his daughter."

Obviously, Samantha didn't want to pursue that conversation, as she didn't speak for a while and when she did, it was to her son.

* * *

It was nearly lunch time before Captain Johnstone had his people working to unload things from the ship. He had armed some of them for guard duty with weapons from the remaining armory, though I felt it had been inadequately done and to too few of his people. Luck was with him and the workers did do a fair amount of work for the time they had allotted. He even got his wife to carry her luggage and to make a couple of trips with what were obviously light loads, but she did get to eat lunch and dinner.

That evening, Captain Johnstone came by, sure as a peacock, proud of his accomplishments.

"I guess I did very well today, don't you think?" He asked.

"If you don't count the loss of over five hours work time and the fact that with my people added, nearly four times as much could have been achieved, I guess you could pat yourself on the back." I told him.

"You don't seem impressed. I thought I did a damned good job. I even got my wife to work."

"Alright, I'll give you that, though I'm guessing her being hungry had a little to do with it. I heard about the attempts last night by both of you."

"What did you expect me to do?"

"Exactly what you did. I won't fault you for trying. I just hope you don't fault me for doing what I had to, either."

"I still think you went a little overboard, but maybe I'd of done the same thing if the situation were reversed." He told me.

"Maybe you'll find out sometime. Is that what you came for?" I asked.

"Yeah, that's it. Why?"

We both heard Samantha start crying from around the corner at the same time.

"I'm sorry Sam, I didn't know you were in there." Johnstone called. "Can I come in and see her?" He asked me.

"Yeah, it might help if you do."

Things started off nice, as he was holding her in his arms, but turned ugly when he started talking to her.

"I didn't know you were actually living with the Wagner family, but I guess I should have expected it." He told her.

You could visibly see the change in her. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"I was just hoping you would wait awhile this time."

"Wait? Wait for what?" She asked, anger flashing in her eyes.

"Wait to get to know someone before you start sleeping with them." He answered.

“You mean unless it’s you I sleep with?” She broke free from his embrace.

He slapped her. “How dare you!”

I went to intervene, but was held back by Loranda.

“How dare I? Does mom know that Brent is yours, or about the two abortions you made me have when I was younger?”

“That’s crazy talk and you know it.”

“Know it? I know it alright, ever since I was nine years old I’ve known it. All I ever wanted was for you to treat me like a daughter. Instead, you’ve treated me like your whore!” She got up and ran to the back of the house, crying worse than ever.

“I think it’s time for you to leave, Mr. Johnstone.” I held back, not trusting myself to move.

“How can you condemn me? You have nearly a dozen wives, which most of them are under age themselves.”

“I’ve accepted them reluctantly and never forced them to do anything, they came to me. As far as Samantha goes, I’ve not touched her.”

“What? Is she too old? Used goods?”

I reached behind my back and pulled out the hidden handgun. “You need to leave now! Or I will have you dragged out, it’s your choice.”

“Fine, I’ll leave, but this isn’t the end of this.” He told me.

“That’s your mistake, now go!” I spoke harshly.

After he left, Loranda saw the look on my face.

“I’ll go get Jake.” She told me.

“No honey, it’s Haquinn I need to talk to and I’ll go myself. You keep my rifle handy while I’m gone.” I grabbed the two mini-Uzi’s and a bag of extra magazines, then left.

“You’re kidding me, right?” Kazak Haquinn asked.

“I wish I was. At first, the guy seemed okay. Now, I know he’s not, and I’ll need your help. Can you have your people ready in the morning?”

“You know I will Randal, what time?”

“Not until after breakfast.” I told him.

“All right, after breakfast it is then. Do you still want the other covered tonight?”

“Yes, thank you.” My smile was grim.

“There’s no need to thank me, I’m glad to be helpful.”

* * *

“Is everything alright Randy?” Loranda asked after I walked in the doorway, noticing that there was a guard in the home, as well as outside the doorway, tonight.

“Not yet, but they’re better.” I told her.

“Are you still doing what you talked about this morning?”

“I’ll keep the possibility open, but I’m not so sure now. I’ll have to see what happens. Where is Samantha at?”

“She’s in the bedroom. She wanted to know if you and I would hold her tonight, and I told her we would. I hope you don’t mind.”

“No, I understand. No wonder she’s been upset so much.”

Loranda looked sorrowful. “No wonder she took the first opportunity to get away from him. She’s going to need some time to heal emotionally, and I don’t think she’s ever been allowed to do just that.”

"You're probably right. Having a son from him has to hurt too. I don't know how she does it." I shook my head.

"Let's leave that for another time, okay?"

"You're right again. Let's go see if we can make things a little better for her."

We went in and held her that night, even after she cried herself to sleep.

* * *

"Are you sure you want to do this?" Loranda asked Samantha after breakfast.

"No, I don't want to, but I need to, and that's much more important."

I was dressed and outfitted for conflict, and even Loranda had a handgun and a 12 gauge pump shotgun, with a bandolier of shells and extra mag's.

"Let's go then." Voiced Loranda, I hadn't seen her this upset in a long time.

By the time we exited the tunnel to the city, I could tell that we weren't alone. I already had my four guards with me, along with a dozen others that had been temporarily assigned to support us as back-up.

As we walked to the city itself, I could see Dudley, surrounded by a group of his people, walking toward me. We met at the wall's gate.

"Morning Dudley what can I do for you?" I asked.

"Just let us come with you." He replied.

"What are you talking about?"

"Come on Randy, Kazak talked to me last night, twice."

“All right, suit yourself.”

We walked into the city and went toward the home assigned to the Johnstone family. On the way, I noticed several people on the rooftops, all armed, and all Kazak’s best. When we arrived, Richard Johnstone was outside in the street, talking with about forty of his crew bosses and guards.

“Mr. Johnstone!” I said loud enough for him to hear me over his talking to others.

“Wagner!”

“I need you to come talk with me for a minute.”

“I don’t think I want to do that. No, not at all.” The men around him took up positions around him.

“Did you tell your people here, about your escapades, or that there might be problems?” I asked. We were still closing the distance.

“They’re my people, they’ll do as I ask.”

“It’d be a real shame for such loyal people to possibly lose there lives, without knowing why, don’t you think?”

“No one has to die at all. We’ll just take what’s ours and leave this place.” Some of the men around him appeared to get a bit confused.

“Does your wife know you molested your own daughter?” I asked.

“Step daughter you idiot.” He realized he had been baited into admitting it, too late. “And no, I didn’t do it either.” But many of those around him were leaving his side already, not wanting to die protecting someone who didn’t deserve it.

“Where are you guys going?” Johnstone asked, but he got no reply. Then his wife walked out behind him.

“Richard, what is going on?” Amanda asked and then looked around, noticing dozens of armed people surrounding the area, which was otherwise clear of innocents.

“I’ll tell you mom.” Called Samantha.

“I thought you told me Samantha had left the cavern, Richard.” Amanda looked shocked.

“That’d be why these four hoodlums were trying to sneak up on the Wagner home last night.” Kazak stated from a roof top, with armed guards watching over the four men who were hog-tied and on their knees.

“Richard, why would you?” She asked.

All but two of Johnstone’s men lay down their weapons and walked away, hands up.

Samantha then told her mom what had happened over the last fourteen years, before leaving Earth.

“So Brent is the product of Richard having his way with you?” Amanda asked.

“Yes. He would always threaten to divorce you and leave you with nothing, if I didn’t continue to do as he said.” Richard was obviously nervous now.

Amanda stepped back into the home, holding the door. “Richard, I’m no longer your wife!” She then slammed the door.

“You can’t do this, we have rights.” One of the attempted kidnappers was saying.

“You already had your trials and were found guilty of crimes against our laws. Your sentence is to be exiled with the clothes on your back and a good knife, deal with it.” Kazak informed the man.

“That’s my ship your unloading, I should get something for that.” Mr. Johnstone said.

“You’re right.” I stepped in. “I’ll let you have one day’s rations and a canteen, let’s see how loyal your men are, when you’re the only one eating.” Then I threw him a sack I had prepared ahead of time.

“How are we supposed to fight dinosaurs with only a knife each?” Johnstone asked.

“I thought you didn’t believe there were dinosaurs out there, that is what you told me before.”

“But . . .”

“Besides, there are seven of you, so that means that most of you can do something, while one of you is being eaten. Who knows, some of you may even learn to survive out there. Mr. Haquinn, would you please untie the feet of our prisoners?” This was done quickly and carefully before all of the now disarmed men were escorted to the Randalville entry under heavy guard. “You will have three minutes to get to the tree line in that direction, otherwise we start shooting to wound, and I’m sure the smell of blood will attract some sort of predator, not to include the noise. Somebody untie the arms of the prisoners and show them where the knives are located please.” That done, I looked at my watch and counted down the seconds to the nearest minute. “Three, two, one, go.” Those seven men ran like the wind.

“Thank you.” Samantha said after they started running.

“For what?” I asked.

“For not killing him. I know what he did was wrong, but I like thinking that he at least might have a chance to survive, even if it is a small chance.”

“We see enough death around here as it is. If a person is able to survive out there, it won’t be comfortable. That’s punishment enough most of the time.”

I went back to the city with Loranda and Samantha, as she wanted to talk with her mother again.

Samantha’s mother opened the door shortly after knocking on the wall.

“I’m sorry Sam.” Amanda finally spoke, tears running down her face. I never knew he was putting you through all of that.”

“I’m sorry too, mom. That’s the reason I tried to stay away and it hurt our relationship in the process.”

“What can I do to make it up to you?” Amanda asked.

“I don’t know that you can. It was dad’s fault mostly. Just try to accept things for what they are here and let go of your desire to change things. I know this is not your idea of a Utopia, but please just give it a try. This isn’t Earth, and there aren’t billions of people ruling the planet. We aren’t the top of the food chain, yet we must find a way to survive and fighting each other isn’t going to help us do that.”

“My own daughter teaching me at my old age. What’s next, a new husband?” Amanda asked, wiping the tears from her face.

* * *

“Thanks a lot man! I thought you had this all figured out. Now we are on our own with no food, no weapons, no shelter, and this place is supposed to be full of dinosaurs.” One of Richard Johnstone’s guards complained.

“Yeah well, I haven’t seen any dinosaurs here, have any of you?”

“No sir, not a one.” Everyone agreed. “Just those bones we ran by.” One of the others added.

“Yes, but that wasn’t living, was it?” The captain asked.

“No, it wasn’t, but . . .” The last man started before being cut off.

“Besides, look what I just found.” Richard picked up an old German rifle. “It looks like we now have a real weapon, as soon as I clean it up, that is.”

“What about bullets?” The same guard asked.

Richard opened the bolt, though it took him some exertion to do so. “It’s got a few rounds in it already, but look around here for some more. Maybe we’ll even find more weapons.”

“Over here sir.” One of the kidnappers announced. “I found a bandolier, it’s a little under half full, but it’s something.”

“That’s what I’m talking about boys. As soon as I clean this baby up, we’re in business.”

“Hey boss.” Called another of the kidnappers. “I found a helmet, but you won’t believe what it looks like.” He held it up. “This looks like a WWII German infantry helmet, how could that be here?”

“The same way they have those German tanks, I guess. I didn’t get into any indepth discussions about such things, we weren’t there long enough.”

“Shit!” The first guard exclaimed. “Captain, you need to look over here for a minute.”

“Where?”

“Up there, in that tree.” He was pointing to a skeleton of a man in tattered bits of a uniform, missing the upper chest and head.

“I see it, or rather what’s left of it. Here, hold this a moment.” He handed the rifle to a guard. “I can’t be sure, but it looks like there might be something useful up there.”

He climbed the tree, getting high enough in it to see more than what was visible from the ground.

“Just a minute guys, there are two more bodies up here.” He went to all of the corpses, gathering anything that looked useful. “We’re in luck boys. I found another rifle with a near full bandolier, two canteens, an old potato-masher grenade, and a Luger with two extra clips in a holster.”

He climbed out of the tree with his treasures. “There was also this.” He sounded out of breath. “It looks like a mess kit, and a bayonet for a rifle.”

“This is great Captain, but why would they not use these to stay alive?”

“Who knows? I’m not going to look a gift horse in the mouth, now let’s get moving.”

* * *

“Mother?” Samantha asked, shocked to see her mom out with several others, gathering flavoids at the edge of the tree line.

“Good morning Sam, How are you today?”

“I’m fine, considering. What are you doing out here?”

“I figured it was time I started pulling my own weight around here, it seems you’re doing the same.”

"I'm impressed. I don't figure you to be out here and I definitely didn't expect you to work today, after what happened yesterday."

"Yesterday was an eye opener, as well as a shock. I must admit that I wasn't prepared for it, or this new life, but I'm going to have to learn sometime. Sitting around feeling sorry for myself, or mad, isn't going to help things."

"I'm proud of you mom." Samantha then became quiet. "Do you hear that?"

"Hear what dear?"

"A rumbling noise, like thunder, or an earthquake."

"No. I don't . . . wait a minute. Yes I do hear it."

That's when the guards started telling everyone to get back to safety.

"Come on mom, let's go."

"All right, I'm coming."

"Drop that and come on, run!" They both started running in the direction of the palisade wall.

"Drop that mom!"

"It isn't slowing me down none, and it'd be a shame to waste the effort." Amanda called out on the run, but still holding the basket of flavoids.

The rumbling could be heard much louder now, coming from the south, the direction they had been working in. The guards were heading in the direction of safety now, too, but staying between the work party, and the source of the approaching noise.

"Hurry it up." Called one of the guards, not knowing what was coming, but that it wouldn't be much longer.

With all the workers inside the wall, the guards that weren't yet safe ran through the gates to safety. Others closed the gates, sliding home the locking bars. The guards that just entered, going up to positions at the top of the wall.

Out of the forest came a large herd of Triceratops', running like the fires of hell were on their tails.

"Don't shoot unless you have to." Yelled the captain of the guards on duty, through his com unit. "They're just scared. See how they don't care about us."

It was true. These large beasts weren't paying any attention to the humans. The closest any of them got to caring about humans, were three that impaled themselves on embedded tree trunks, were probably wondering how these trees happened to be keeping them from escaping, and how badly they hurt.

As the herd was clearing the tree line, the guards could see the cause of the stampede. T-rex's were now coming out into the open.

"Rodney, go tell Randal what we've got." The captain told his runner, then. "Okay guys, bring down the rex's, fire at will."

A new thunderstorm sounded, one of gunfire, bullets flying through the air, some hitting their targets, many more missing completely. One rex lost his or her head, literally, as a 25mm LR round found its intended victim. Another rex charged at the wall, not heading the pointed tree trunks, and impaling itself, making an agonizing noise. The guards were still pouring streams of lead into the remaining rex's, but not without loss. There were no impalers in front of the gate, and already, five guards had been killed. Most had

been bitten in half, or decapitated by the fast and powerful jaws that made these monsters so dangerous.

A grenade exploded, taking both small upper arms and a large portion of the belly from a rex that had just killed another guard. The t-rex slowly dropped to the ground, making a hideous noise as it did so. The battle lasted no more than two or three minutes, yet seemed like hours to those that survived. When it was over, there were four dead t-rex, the other two made good their escape. Fourteen humans died, mostly guards, only one worker who had stayed too close to the wall had died, being thrown through the air, already dead before hitting the ground, half of the body in each of two directions.

There was blood everywhere, as were dead bodies, or parts of them anyways, when I arrived on the scene.

It took only a minute for the guard captain to relay to me what happened.

“Where was the Assault Armor patrol?” I asked.

“They’re not due on yet, this was an early work party, before the normal day’s start.” I was informed, looking at the time; I could tell that he was correct.

“All right.” I told him. “I want no more work details until normal work hours.”

“I understand completely.”

“Good, let’s get this mess cleaned up, bury our dead, and see about salvaging what we can from our unwanted guests.”

“I’m right on it.” The guard captain announced.

“Oh, and let these guards stand down tomorrow. I’m sure some of them will need it, they lost their friends today.”

“More than you know.” The guard captain replied.

“Mr. Wagner.” Amanda walked up to me. “I’m sorry. I thought you were using dinosaurs to scare us into doing what you wanted, I know better now. I’m ashamed at myself for doubting you. Now I see how quickly life can be taken away in this place, please forgive me.” She was still holding a basket of flavoids.

“You don’t need to apologize, but I think Samantha might do well to get her mother’s attention right now, I think she’s in shock.” I didn’t mention the flavoids, but felt that Amanda was still in a slight state of shock herself.

I then looked around at all the damage done to the area. Somehow the dinosaurs missed colliding with the ship that was parked in the bulk of the clearing, but the bullets and larger shells didn’t have such luck. There were holes of different sizes all over the side of the ship from the larger shells, and hundreds, or maybe thousands of marks on the side from the small arms fire that didn’t penetrate. One thing was for sure, work on unloading the ship would be far behind schedule today.

* * *

“David, I want you to pass the word around that we’re looking for helicopter pilots.” I mentioned to him a couple hours after the battle with the rex’s.

“I thought I heard a rumor, something about a shipment of helicopters.”

“It’s only a pair of them, not a shipment, but I do still need pilots for them.”

"All right buddy, I'll see what I can find." Dudley replied.

"Thanks David. I appreciate it. Oh, see if you have anyone that did any time with an Abrams tank, or an L.A.V. also."

"That's some serious firepower you're talking about, even if they are the outdated ones. I'll sure do it."

"Thanks again, I'm going home now." I didn't want to tell anyone, but my leg was a little sore from over doing it the last couple of hours.

"Ahhh . . ." Splash.

"Come on, get out of that gunk, man.

"What have you got Captain?" Richard Johnstone's guard Rodney asked.

"I'm not sure, but this stuff feels and smells like oil." Johnstone replied. "I wish we had Chuck with us."

"Who's Chuck?"

"Chuck Hadley. He's a chemist that came here with us, part of my crew. He's forgotten more about making this stuff into gold, than most men ever learn."

"What good is gold here?"

"Not gold, gold, liquid gold. Give him the right equipment, and enough time, and he'd have fuel, plastic, propane, and any number of other products that we were used to back on Earth."

"So he's some genius or something, right?"

"No. He's just real good at what he does." Richard hesitated. "You know, he just might be a genius after all. I'm not sure, but I think that we might have just found our way back into civilization boys. Who wants to go with me

and try?" Everybody either raised their hand, or nodded dumbly.

* * *

The next two days went by quickly, with a lot of work being done, mostly unloading the ships, and getting folks settled in. There was still crop and animal maintenance, along with carving up several dead dinosaurs from the previous battle, but those were about the most of it for most.

It was also a short time of healing for some. For Amanda and Samantha, it was more than that; it was a time of forgiveness, and getting to know one another again. This time it was with many new realizations in their lives. Among these were the facts that Richard, once a part of their lives, was likely killed by dinosaurs, which really existed on this world, and were very dangerous. Life here would never be like back on Earth.

Both were at my home when the guard runner came up, breathing hard from the quick sprint he had just made, and calling out. "Mr. Wagner! Mr. Wagner!"

"Yes son, what is it?"

"You've gotta come quick! It's Captain Johnstone and his men. They say they have important news."

"I'm on my way. It must be important for them to come back here." I grabbed my rifle.

"I'll come with you." Amanda announced, following behind me as I walked toward the gate as fast as I could.

When I arrived, I went to the top and called out. "All right, what's so important that you'd be willing to risk coming back here?"

“One word, plus one name, in exchange for food, descent weapons with ammo, and transportation away from here, with any others who are willing to go with us, especially my wife, if she’ll have me.” I then realized she was standing next to me.

“You have my word that if you do have information worth it, you’ll have what you seek, within reason.” I told him, now noticing that only six men were present. “Where is your other man at?”

“One of the dinosaurs ate him, the rest of us ran. We had these guns, but couldn’t make them work.” I believed him. They looked too rusted to be usable.

I noticed Jim Adams on watch, and called to him. “Get me Mark Suthers here, pronto.” Then I looked at Johnstone and his raggedy crew and heard noise in the distance. “Open the gates and let these men in, close the gates, but keep them under guard.”

“Sir?” The guard asked.

“Just do it, quickly.” The men below were already opening one side of the gate, the men with Johnstone hurrying to the opening, as they had all heard the same noise behind them.

As the gates were again closed, being locked, a hideous dinosaur came from around the ship. It had a spiked tail and head, a mouth large enough to bite a man in half, and what appeared to be an armored hide, with what looked like bits of bone projecting from the sides and top.

“What the hell is that?” I heard a guard ask.

“If I can come up and look, I’d be able to tell you whether or not it’s the one that got Harold earlier.” Johnstone called back.

"All right Richard." I called down. "But just you, and over here."

He came up, bringing no weapons, and looked at the creature below. "Yes, that's the same long necked creep that grabbed Harold when we didn't even know that thing was there." Then we all heard the distinctive sound of a t-rex, so did this new threat, that we later named longcarnasaurus.

"Hold your fire, let's see what happens here." I ordered. The word was passed down the line.

Not one, but two rex's came out of the woods, then stopped, voicing agitation. This new creature called out, making a higher pitched sound, yet somehow more eerily than anything I'd ever heard in my life. The two rex's turned tail and ran off, now being pursued by this other creature, though it was obviously slower than the rex's were.

"What the hell was that?" I asked.

"I've no idea. I was hoping you could tell me." Johnstone replied.

"Not the what, as in what kind of dinosaur, though I don't know that either, but the fact that two rex's just ran away from something."

"Does make one wonder, doesn't it?" Johnstone was looking at his wife, on the other side of me.

"Yeah, but now that they're all gone, what's so important?"

"Oil."

"What? You're trying to tell me you found a drum of oil and came here to tell me that?"

"Not a drum, natural oil, at ground level."

"What am I supposed to do with it? It has to be refined to be worth anything."

“That’s where the name comes in. Chuck Hadley, a member of my old crew is a literal genius with oil. Put him and the right equipment at the right spot and he will get a refinery up and running.”

“If you hadn’t noticed, we don’t have a refinery or even a drilling rig.”

“That’s where Chuck shines. He can make those things out of stuff you can’t imagine.”

I looked for the runner that first called me here. “Find this Chuck Hadley. Tell Dudley it’s top priority. Can you ride a motorcycle?”

“Yes sir!” He took off into the cave, where three motorcycles were always kept, a big smile on his face.

“All right Richard, you should go back down now.”

“I’ll go with you.” Amanda spoke for the first time since he came in the gate. “We have a lot to talk about and things to sort.”

I found another guard. “How about grabbing these men some mil-rats? Make it two meals each.”

“All right, I’ll be right back.”

“And some water as well.” I called after he started to leave.

“I’m on it.” He replied.

* * *

“Mr. Hadley. Richard here says that given a supply of oil, you could pump it and refine it. Is that true?” It had taken less than an hour to get him here in front of me.

“Given some basic supplies, yes sir, I could.”

“How about with what we have on hand?” I asked.

“I’d have to look around, but I think so, at least on a small scale. If you want large scale production, I’ll need to do some serious thinking and scrounging.”

“You can pretty much have what you want, but ask first in case it’s something we need.”

“What do you have available?” Hadley asked.

“We have two ruined ships out there that you can use anything you want from, except the nuke engines and any rocket fuel that made it. The rocket fuel is going to be used to refuel the three ships that aren’t ruined, if possible.”

“Can I go take a look and see what’s there?”

“Yes, but I’m sending you with a large group of guards and you’re going in an L.A.V. Will you need any trucks to go with you?”

“Yeah, let me take one, just in case.”

“That’ll make a total of three then, as two will be full of guards, as well as a hummer.”

“When should I be ready?” He asked.

“In one hour, maybe earlier.” I informed him.

It took longer than an hour, as weapons were mounted to the Hummer and trucks, but the time was broken up by Mark coming to look at the old weapons that had been brought and a side excursion I made.

“I think I can save the bolts and receivers, along with some parts from the trigger mech’s, but the barrels and stocks are beyond repair. This Luger might be a different story. It looks like it was protected from the worst of the weather. The magazines will need new springs and the ammo is iffy, but I could have it in working condition by morning.”

“Okay Mark, do it please.” I asked of him.

“The Ruger first, I’m guessing.”

“Yes, it’ll be going with Mr. Johnstone when he leaves.”

Mark left, and Richard approached me. “You mean you’re going to let us stay the night here?”

“Yes, but only if you stay in that other cave, in the other half of the palisade wall.”

“We’ll do it, and we won’t even be a problem.” He promised.

“As long as you’re still around, you’re a problem, just don’t make it worse for anyone.”

“Okay, I won’t. Real quick, is there any firewood over there, or could I send a couple guys out to gather some?”

“Neither, I’ll have some brought over before it gets dark.”

“Thank you, it has been cold.”

“Yeah.” Then I walked off to wish Chuck well on his scavenging hunt.

“It won’t be pretty, but I can make due quite well with the scavenge from those ships, all I need to know is where this oil is.” Chuck told me after his return, some three and a half hours later.

“If that’s so, then come with me. I’ve got the choppers waiting.” I looked to Johnstone. “Richard, come on. It’s time for you to show us where this oil is.”

“You mean I’m riding with you guys?” He asked.

“You have a better idea?” I answered his question with one of my own.

“No, I don’t.”

“Then let’s get this over with.”

I reflected back to the supposed random selection for those to leave Earth. Out of all the ships before the helicopters arrived, there were only three pilots that could fly helicopters of any sort, yet the ship that brought the helicopters had nine pilots that could fly that particular four seat scout copter, and three of those pilots were women. One of the men hadn't lived through the trip, but was known by two of the others.

Now for the first time known to us, helicopters were in the air here on this planet. Richard, Chuck, myself, and a pilot in one, three heavily armed guards and a pilot in the other. The view is great from up here. I can see four of the five ships, parked in what looks like hap-hazard fashion. I can see the motor pool full of vehicles, the palisade walls, open areas in the valley and I can see the water courses.

Not far away, over the next line of mountains, lay a large river, and at that river are several herd of herbivores, lazily drinking their fill and grazing. Above that, I can see what looks like a large cave opening, one of those strange gratings like our air intakes throughout our caverns, but this is in the form of doors. One is open, and one is closed. They meet in the middle when both are closed properly, this much is clear. More surprising is the remains of a stone wall surrounding the area. A few small trees are starting to grow within the area enclosed by the wall and there is a gate-like structure offset from the double doors into the mountain. It's clear that somebody lived here before and not too long ago.

"There." Johnstone announced. "Off to the left of that outcropping."

"I see it. How about you Chuck?" I asked. The pilot turned toward where Richard had told us.

“I see it alright. It looks to extend further out than I’d hoped.”

As we approached the sight, we could get a better idea as to what we were seeing, Chuck took control.

“If there’s this much oil, and it does look like oil, on the surface right here, my best guess is that there must be enough here to take care of all our needs for ten to twenty years or more without trying to find another source. I could be rich on Earth if I had such a deposit, before everything happened. What do you say we get back and I’ll start the planning phase?”

“Not quite yet.” I told him. “Pilot, how much fuel do we have left?”

“We’re still at a full tank, why?”

“I want you to turn to the right a bit and head west some more.”

“Will do. What are we looking for now?” The pilot asked.

“I saw another sight for living purposes, but I want to find another even farther out.”

“You got it.”

“I’m confused Mr. Wagner. Why would you need three living areas?” Richard Johnstone inquired.

“Because the second one is right next to that oil field, so I plan to move about half of the people to it, if it will fit them, and leave the rest where they are.”

“That only explains two places.” Johnstone noted.

“Look, I don’t like you. I don’t like what you did, or what you will probably do, but you did do something extremely good here, and it seems you might actually survive, so the

third location is for you and whoever wants to join you. After that, your fate is in your own hands. If your people survive, maybe your people can one day have a trade agreement with ours, but honestly, if I never see you again, it won't hurt my feelings one bit."

"Thank you for the opportunity and for the honesty. I will try to make some good happen in this world."

"I truly hope so." The ride stayed quiet until three ridge lines later, when the pilot pointed at another cave entrance, high up on the side, with an obvious road of some construction.

"There, just to our right, do you see it?" The pilot asked.

"Yes, I do. What do you think Richard? It has a defendable access and it's far enough away for us to not bother each other."

"Sounds good to me." Richard made the right choice in accepting the first real opportunity that came by. Can we take a direct route for us to follow?"

"I'll do what I can." The pilot answered. "Hold on, it looks like we've got company."

"What?" I asked. "Who could it possibly be?"

"The other pilot says we've attracted some native wildlife." He told me as he was still banking hard to the right. Only a few seconds later, gunfire came from behind us.

"Okay folks, pterodactyl's down, we're plotting a course for home."

* * *

There was no easy way through the mountains, except by helicopter, but there was a way that looked more promising

than any others. Looked was the key word, as there was no guarantee of a way across the river and a couple of the passes might not work without some hard cutting and blasting involved. This would mean using the heavy equipment and having a lot of protection. It would also require a lot of fuel, possibly more than could be carried. I went to Damon Jameson for possible answers.

“How about mounting a holding tank onto the back of one of those trucks? It won’t take much to get one out of one of the wrecked ship’s hulls and I can rig up a hose for it easily enough. Those trucks can carry at least 600 gallons of extra fuel, by weight, and the holding tank I’m thinking of is a 500 gallon capacity unit. It’s no normal fuel truck, but it’s the best I can come up with.” He told me.

“That will work fine, but I’m thinking we ought to do that to two trucks. One to stay with the vehicles until it’s empty and one to put fuel into as it’s made. Right now we don’t have the storage facilities to hold that much.”

“That’s easy enough, but don’t you produce the fuel over at the city? That’s kind of on the wrong side of things isn’t it?” Damon asked.

“Yes, it is, and I’m still working on that.” I answered, thinking as I did so. “I just haven’t come up with a good answer yet. The best we’ve got right now are a couple of 55 gallon drums. Kathy fills one up, then works on the other, while the first is put to use.”

“You mean that Simpleton woman, the one who doesn’t have time for a man?” Damon asked.

“That’s the one. Actually, I kind of thought you and her would make a nice couple.”

"Don't even start all that. If I wanted a woman to replace my lovely Belle, God bless her soul, I'd have gone down and picked me out one."

"No you wouldn't. You're too darn stubborn and both of us know it." My statement hit home.

"Let's get back to the problem at hand, you know, how you're supposed to get fuel to the right place."

"She is a rather attractive woman though, isn't she?" I asked him, to which he smiled a bit.

"That's not nothin' to do with it, now, back to this fuel problem please."

"Okay." I laughed. "You win for now, but soon . . ." I let it trail off. "I guess I'll ask Kathy if she has any ideas for transporting the fuel, I'll get back with you in a while. Where might you be?" I kept my other thoughts to myself.

"I should be at the motor pool, with some assistants, working on a couple of trucks." He answered.

"Okay, I'll meet you there."

* * *

"The only thing I can think of is to bring the crop to the other side, and produce the fuel there, but that means transporting the fuel to those tanks on this side. I don't have the equipment to have two separate stations." Kathy Simpleton told me after I asked her about the problem.

"How about going shopping at the old ship sights and see what you can come up with? There is a convoy heading out in the morning, and there will be a couple of others scavenging at the same time. One is a new guy, Chuck

Hadley, and the other is Damon Jameson, someone like you, who is too stubborn to find a mate. He thinks you're quite striking and his little girl Michelle could really use a female role model, she's only seven years old."

"I don't need a man, or the family life, Randal. You make up for more than my share, thank you. Wait, isn't that the family that came down in the shuttle, with the woman on board that died in transit?" She asked, remembering that awful day.

"Yes, that's who I'm talking about. Do you want to meet him?" I raised my hopes.

"No cupid, but I do thank you for trying. It's just not my thing."

"Okay, back to business. I need you to write up a list of the things you will need and bring it to me in an hour. I need to compare the three lists and see if things will work out."

"Where will you be?"

I smiled at myself inside. I'll be at the west motor pool, going over plans for the trucks."

"Okay, I'll bring the list in an hour." She confirmed.

"Take care Kathy." Now I went to work the third part of my plan.

* * *

"Are you sure Michelle should go out there?" Bianka Schultz asked. This was my wife Zietal's mom, the butcher's wife, and the impromptu teacher for this group of young children.

"Her father will be there with us. In fact, I planned to take her there myself." I told her.

"I guess it should be okay then." She walked over to Damon's daughter. "Michelle honey, Mr. Wagner is going to walk you to go see your daddy at work, come along dear."

"Hello Michelle, how would you like to see your daddy at work?" I asked as we walked away from the class.

"Will there be dinosaurs?" She asked.

"I don't think so, but if there are, we'll scare them off, okay?"

"Yeah, I'll help you scare them . . . growl!" I laughed with her.

"Michelle, how would you like your daddy to find a girlfriend?"

"Mmm, well, mommy can't come back, she's in heaven, and daddy's always sad about that, I miss her too. If daddy gets a girlfriend, can she be my friend too?"

"I'm sure of it."

"Oh goody, goody, I want a girlfriend for daddy." She did a little skip.

"I'll tell you what, there's going to be a lady there that I happen to know your daddy thinks is pretty, so when she gets there, why don't you ask him about her."

"Okay, will that make her his girlfriend?"

"I don't really know. Maybe you could ask her that." I almost felt bad having her do all of this, but figured it was worth a try.

"Yeahh! I like this." She grabbed my hand and swung it profusely as we finished walking to the motor pool.

Kathy wasn't there yet, but there were still several minutes left in the hour I had given her.

“Michelle honey, what are you doing here?” Damon asked his daughter.

“Mr. Wagner said I could come here and watch you work today.” She beamed.

“Oh, he did, did he?”

“Uh huh, we walked here together and I got to get out of school to be here. We’re going to scare away the dinosaurs for you.”

“Is that right?” Michelle nodded her head. “Well then, I guess I ought to show you what I’m doing.” Which is what he started doing, telling her how he was going to make the two trucks carry a lot of fuel for the other vehicles. He was almost finished when Kathy arrived, list in hand.

“All right then, let’s all gather around here.” I called. Once we were all together, we went through a round of introductions, getting the evil eye from Damon.

“She’s pretty daddy. Is she going to be your girlfriend?” Michelle jumped right to it, surprising even me.

“Honey, daddy has to work. I need you to be good, okay?” Damon insisted, but only lightly.

“Okay, I’ll be good.” She smiled at me. “But Mr. Wagner says you like her. Why don’t you make her your girlfriend? I know you miss mommy, maybe she can help you not be so sad.”

Now both Damon and Kathy looked at me like I was in trouble. “I’ll remember this Randy.” Damon said.

“What did I do?” I asked in mock innocence.

“It looks like you will have your ears full from all of this.” Chuck laughed. “I’m not sure we should compare lists right now, the drama’s too tense.”

"It wouldn't be if Mr. Cupid here would leave things alone." Kathy stated.

"He's not Mr. Cupid, he's Mr. Wagner." Michelle told Kathy. "You're so silly, even I know that."

"I didn't mean it like . . ." She hesitated, trying to figure out how to explain it to a seven year old. "You know what? You're a pretty smart little girl."

"Daddy says I'm a bigger girl, and I'm going to grow up to be big and strong, just like him."

"Mr. Jameson, please tell me she just made that up." Kathy sounded exasperated.

"What's wrong with telling her that?" Damon asked.

"Girls don't grow up to be big and strong like men, that's what."

"How was I supposed to know that?" He asked sincerely.

"Is this what you are teaching her at home, seriously?" Kathy asked.

Damon just looked at me, then at Chuck, a sour expression on his face. Chuck and I just laughed. "Wait a minute. What did I do? What's so funny?" Then Kathy started to laugh with us, which made Michelle giggle.

"Daddy, you're funny."

Chuck and I were both laughing too hard. He was grabbing his belly and I had tears streaming down my face.

"All right Randal." Kathy said. "For Michelle's sake, if not my own, I'll give it a try. She definitely needs a woman in her life, if Mr. Jameson agrees that is."

"Agrees to what?" Damon asked, looking more confused than ever.

“For her to be your girlfriend, daddy. You’re a silly dad.” Michelle started laughing in earnest now, leaving only Damon behind, to catch up fully.

“You mean?” He asked

“Yes, I mean exactly that.” Kathy laughed.

“But . . . I didn’t even ask yet.”

We all just started laughing even harder. It was a precious moment in a land of constant sorrow, and a sparkle in the eyes of two people who previously hadn’t had them. I was lucky, my gamble paid off.

* * *

“Well Johnstone, it looks like you’ve got a following after all.” I told him. “You will have nearly a hundred people with you when you leave. It’s not enough to keep strictly to yourselves, but an occasional infusion of others will make it possible for survival on your own.” I informed him, after giving the word to those that didn’t like the way things were here.

“Doesn’t it take a minimum of 130 or so people for isolation?”

“Yes, something like that. As I said, you’ll need others moving in once in a while, but I’m not going to tell people to live where they don’t want to. There will probably be others that find that they don’t like living here, and they are welcome to live with you if you want them. Like I said, we will open negotiations for a trade agreement with you, as long as it isn’t with you personally. Right now, this is the home for you and your people. It seems that your wife

wants to live with you, as do some of the other women. You and your people will be confined to this area, and the outside, until it's time to move you. I hope you do better this time around, for others' sakes."

"I will."

"Don't tell me, show them." I pointed to his men, and the women that were joining them. "By the way, I've had a door and frame built to keep out our crawly friends, now that you have innocent's with you."

"What crawly friends are those?"

"They're kind of like huge spiders, with fewer legs. They're about as hard to kill as raptors, and taste like pork, but they can crawl upside down on any surface we've encountered them at. Without the door and framework, you could be their next meal."

"Well that's comforting, anything else we need to know?"

"Yes. The pterodactyls also attack people on occasion, watch out for them."

"Will do, and thank you."

"Later." Was all I said, and then walked away. The door would be installed that night.

* * *

"How'd your trip go?" I asked of Chuck, Kathy, and Damon, when I saw them get back the next day.

"It might have been faster if you hadn't got these two together, but things turned out alright, considering." Chuck told me.

“Any critter problems?” I asked.

“None worth mentioning, just scared off a herd of little guys, don’t know anything about them, they took off too fast.”

“It happens, I’m just glad things went well today.”

“We found pretty much all we needed, but I’m going to have to make another trip or two to get the things we didn’t have room for. I figured it best to let these lovebirds get their stuff first. We’ll be needing fuel before we get to the field of oil, so I can go back while they’re up and running.”

“Thank you Chuck, I appreciate it, and will make sure you get whatever it is you need, if I can.”

“I’ll hold you to it Mr. Wagner.”

“You do that, partner.”

* * *

“It’s Joana’s turn tonight dear. I hope you’re rested.” Loranda stated, laughing at me when I looked up to the Lords place.

“Heaven help me, take some of these heathens and give them to some young men who can handle this work.” I said out loud, which just made her and the others laugh hysterically. “It isn’t funny. You ladies take all my strength every night, and most mornings too.”

That didn’t help, it just made them laugh more. When the laughter subsided some, Loranda spoke up again. “Men . . . All their lives they dream of having a bunch of wives, and, or girlfriends, then when they get them, they complain about how tired they are. I don’t think they know

what they want.” This just made them all look at me and laugh some more.

“Aren’t you all pregnant yet? You ought to be by now, I feel like I’m being used as a baby factory, without the benefit of shut-down time.” I told them all.

“That’s not true, not at all.” Loranda smiled. “You’ve had more down time than any other man here, you clumsy oaf.”

“What’s an oaf?” Cristy asked.

“It’s kind of like a foolish person, with a twist.” Loranda answered.

“Oh, that’s kind of funny.” Again with the good natured laughing at my expense. It was late already and I let them have their fun, not that I had much choice in the matter.

“I’m going to bed now ladies. Good night.”

“Good night honey.” They all said in unison, which was what happened every night. “At least it will be for Joana.” Zietal added.

“Don’t forget our kisses.” Loranda shook her finger at me. So there I was giving kisses to all of them, even Samantha joined in this fun, though luckily she hadn’t yet tried to sleep with me.

Loranda was more right than she knew. Joana kept me awake for a couple of hours, then woke me again twice during the night, and took advantage of me before breakfast as well. Men are supposed to restock at night, but I was looking forward to going to work, in order to get some rest. I must have really looked haggard when I came out for breakfast.

“Wow Randal!” Elizabeth was the first to comment. “Didn’t you get any sleep last night? You look more exhausted than you did when you went to bed.”

“I think I slept, but not much.” I answered, half asleep.

“Me wish I could get same many attentions.” Riada added. “Maybe you giving me like that tomorrow night, when it’s my night.”

On and on it went through breakfast, but I had to laugh inwardly. Loranda had pegged it right when she said men always dream about having multiple wives or girlfriends. Now I wish I only had one, well, maybe two or three, or? What was I thinking? No more than two, yea, that’s a good number. “I gotta go to work, see ya soon.”

* * *

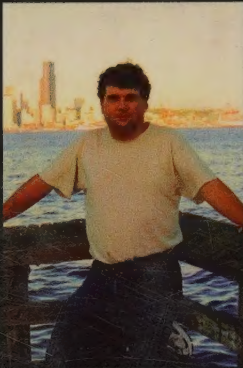
Across the valley sat a Utah Raptor that was missing a toe on one foot.

“I need to figure a way to get rid of those darned new-foods, once and for all.” He thought to himself.

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